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SCIENCE FICTION IN REVIEW

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Welcome to Thrust #16—and an extra special welcome to all those who are reading this issue (Noreason Two, The 38th World Science Fiction Convention in Boston). In honor of Thrust's first Hugo Award nomination, this issue is going to press three weeks early so that it can make its debut at the convention.

I have a rather selfish hope that this year's nomination is just the first of many for Thrust.

With that in mind, on to this issue.

I'm particularly happy to present this issue's interview with Joan Vinge. With her first few stories in the mid-seventies, Joan made an immediate name for herself in the science fiction field. Each time a Joan Vinge story appears, it is almost guaranteed to be among the most notable of the year.

Michael Bishop continues this issue in a more serious vein with an insightful portrait of Gene Wolfe, including a brief interview. Mike and Gene, it seems to me, have a great deal in common. Not only are they two of science fiction's best and most eloquent stylists, but also possess two of the field's largest vocabularies. An extended interview involving these two would probably evolve into something that would sound like people speaking in tongues...

Ted White takes a hard look at the field of fantasy and its fans. When Ted White discusses a topic, as most of you have probably noticed by now, he doesn't just do a few fancy little dance steps around the edges.

Dave Bischoff, attempting to stay out of trouble this issue, gives his anglophile's view of that offbeat British sf TV series, Dr. Who. If you, like myself, have never been introduced to this series, I think you'll find this a fascinating introduction.

John Shirley this issue takes on Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine. This is also the last column by John Shirley—at least until I can convince him to come back—and I, for one, feel Thrust will greatly miss John's highly iconoclastic approach.

Our two non-staff articles this issue, by Mark J. McGarry and Jessica Amanda Salmonson, are among the best I think I've had the pleasure to publish, both concerning their personal experiences breaking into sf writing. I wonder how many other young writers have fallen victim to the pitfalls so honestly described by Mark but lacked the courage which Mark so obviously exhibits in chronicling it.

Finally, David Miller finishes his three part series on sf and fantasy gaming, and I can now say that I have at least some understanding of what all those people have been doing in the games rooms of all the science fiction conventions I've been to for the last few years.

The bad news this issue is, as you've probably noticed, that this issue is a bit crowded because

Publisher & Editor: D. Douglas Fraiz
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Contributing Editors: Dave Bischoff, Michael Bishop,
George Alec Effinger, Charles G. Hoyle,
John Shirley, Dan Green, Ted White

of a smaller page count. This was a utterly necessary move, as Thrust's costs continue to increase faster than the revenues.

The good news is that starting next issue, Thrust will be typeset. This may seem incongruous with the bad news above, but some research has concluded that this will be a cost effective move. With typesetting, Thrust can have better readability with a higher type density, i.e. more words per page.

See you all next issue.

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INTERVIEW: JOAN VINGE

by Robert Frazier

THRUST: You used to write poetry; how far back do your roots in written expression go?

VINGE: I guess you could say that they go back before I was three years old in a sense. My mother discovered that I was "making up stories" to put myself to sleep. My friends and I used to write stories together in grade school. I used to illustrate the stories, too; my ambition was to become an artist. After I discovered Science Fiction, I started to write it; but I rarely, if ever, finished anything or showed them to anyone. I began writing poetry in high school, and continued in college, but then my inspiration seemed to dry up. At about the same time, my ability to draw did also -- as a direct result of confrontations with incredibly insensitive art teachers. About all I had left was my prose writing, and I kept that very private. I never considered my writing seriously until after I was married, when Vernor urged me to really work at it. If it had not been for him telling me I had potential, I would probably never have sent anything out.

THRUST: Any chance you might take these up again?

VINGE: Since I have started going to conventions and viewing the art shows, I have gotten excited about doing art myself, again. Right now my "artistic coordination" is shot, my hand can't do what my mind wants it to. I have begun taking some art classes here, in New York, so I hope to get my hand in again and start doing some serious drawing and painting. I would love to be able to illustrate my own stories some day.

THRUST: How much of the real Joan shows through the fiction? Do past memories or experiences surface in your work; for example, a traumatic encounter in your youth?

VINGE: I think a fair amount of the Real Me does go into my writing. Since I tend to get very involved personally in what I write, the stories reflect a lot of my own attitudes and values, and so do the characters. Past memoirs and experiences definitely play a part too. The adage about "write what you know" seems like a contradiction in terms when you're writing science fiction; but if you can work in real-life experiences in altered form, it gives the fantastic elements more believability. Just offhand, a couple of examples are the incident in "To Bell the Cat" when Jary releases the alien trogs and then claims they got away by accident (though I got away with it), the time when I set free some fireflies my friends were going to make into goulash, and the villain in "Media Man", who is based on someone Vernor and I once spent a very unpleasant evening with.

THRUST: How much of an influence does your anthropological background and knowledge have on your work?

VINGE: Anthropology does play a large part in my writing. It shares a great deal in common with science fiction generally -- they both show you new ways of looking at the world and your own individual perception of it. I frequently take inspiration from the various cultures that exist on earth, when I am creating new societies on other worlds or in the future. I also use the basic format of an ethnography to "build" the world I am creating in an orderly manner, before I actually start to write. Anthropology gives you an entire mind-set that is very conducive

Sometimes I get some very exciting ideas from reading someone else's work, and then thinking: Well, I would have done it this way.

THRUST: "View from a Height" is the first short story I can recall seeing of yours, Joan; do you have trouble holding a story down to a short length?

VINGE: I guess I do. I think the short form really is one of the hardest to master successfully. Many short stories that seem effective are really quite superficial when you look at them critically. Frequently it is just the O. Henry twist ending that makes you remember them. Ursula Le Guin's "The Day Before the Revolution", on the other hand, shows how a skilled writer can create real people, background and mood in under 7,500 words. A good short story comes close to being a poem; both forms require great discipline and confidence to accomplish.

THRUST: Or perhaps it is because short prose necessarily leaves out background, are by nature somewhat flat. Your gift includes the ability to make material in your stories round; you are stylistically a realist. If you were, let's imagine, plotting a surreal landscape and situation, I picture you working at describing things concretely, at generating a sense of wonder; as opposed to writing it in a surreal prose form. Do directly experimental fiction forms attract you as a writer?

VINGE: Yes, I'm interested in stream-of-consciousness and expressionist styles; which are in their way very much a part of poetry and poetic prose. In the middle of "Media Man", which is by and large one of my most straightforward prose jobs, there is a scene where the protagonist is drugged; I intentionally wrote in a stream-of-consciousness, dreamlike way. Generally, though, I like the challenge of making something tangible and accessible to the reader, hopefully without losing the surreal quality that the image produces in my mind. I feel that a certain amount of so-called surreal prose is nothing but a smokescreen for someone who really has little to say. In the same way that a certain amount of modern art is really nothing but an indulgence in the self. Not all, by any means, but some...I like the G. K. Chesterton quote: "Art, like morality, consists in drawing the line somewhere."

THRUST: You have sold a second novel called THE SNOW QUEEN. The image that title conjures up is, a Kay Nielson illustration of a tall, thin, pale skinned, Nordic woman. Is this one a new direction for you into fantasy?

VINGE: No, actually the book is not a fantasy, although it has its roots in fantasy. My original inspiration, Anderson's "The Snow Queen", caught my fancy since most of the main, active characters were female. Most fairy tales are really degenerate mythology, particularly Earth Mother/vegetation cult mythologies, yet they invariably have a patriarchal overlay of handsome princes. There are men in it, and certainly in my novel, but the women really get into the action for a change.

Since I was also interested in goddess mythology, I read THE WHITE GODDESS by Robert Graves. It is a fascinating study of myth origins, and it fit in perfectly, so as a result there is a wealth of symbolism and

influence from the Grave's work underlying THE SNOW QUEEN. First and foremost, though, it really is science fiction, and I hope it reads as such for people who do not care for myths; and that it can be read on several levels by those who enjoy myth and fantasy as well. Actually the heroine of THE SNOW QUEEN is an ethereal, pale sort, more to mind like her Edmund Dulac portrait; but she is also as strong and relentless as ice, and two different people, or dozens.

THRUST: This is, then, another of your futures which is "beyond equality", to allude to the premise behind McIntyre's anthology, in which reasonably competent women and reasonably incompetent men eat at the same table. Do you consciously create these?

VINGE: It is really important to me that I create characters who are identifiable to the present day reader, and hopefully sympathetic; who are also functioning as equals -- men and women, young and old, from all ethnic backgrounds including alien ones. Reading especially sf, has always had great effect on how I see myself and the world; as a result, I find myself hoping that my work will influence some other reader somewhere, make them more tolerant and understanding of things they do not know how to deal with. Particularly I wish to make more women aware of their possibly futures; and men better able to feel that it is right for women to be reasonably competent and themselves reasonably incompetent. We are all human beings.

Recently I read "View from a Height", which is about a woman coping with alone with a great responsibility, on the radio, 2 A.M. live, here in New York. It still got some phonecalls, including one from a man who said that "he usually didn't like sf by women, but he liked this story". I was pleased; maybe the next time he sees something written by a woman, he might be more willing to give it an honest chance.

THRUST: Does the main character become a mythic figure in the plotted contents of the book, or is the novel itself a myth-making of sorts?

VINGE: Well, the main character is really two people: the Snow Queen, and also the girl Moon, who is her clone-child but doesn't know it through most of the story. The Snow Queen is in a way almost a mythic figure, one who has lived two or three times as long as most people and yet stays young. She's a living, human woman, but she has aspects about her that one associates with an Elemental. Moon on the other hand is much more a simple human being in the course of the book -- the novel is a myth-making about her, at the same time. Her life is just beginning as the novel ends, and it remains to be seen (hopefully in a sequel) just what its outcome will be. Events that will someday be myth to her people are just happening to her and the many other characters in her environment at the time the book takes place.

THRUST: The novel, at one point, was called CARBUNCLE, was it not? It was titled after the city in the story. Is Caruncle the basic landscape for the story like CIRQUE, or have you used a broader, interstellar background? Jim Frenkel said "It has it all."

VINGE : Except for the kitchen sink! Actually, I did want to call the novel CARBUNCLE after the city, originally. I perceived the story as dealing with a broad array of people from a fairly diverse collection of worlds -- but Caruncle the city was the focus for their coming together, the place where they interacted, the catalyst for their different lives. There are other settings in the story, on planet and off, but things and people have a way of coming back to the city.

I liked the name "Caruncle" because of the word's dual meaning. "The city is either a jewel or a fester, depending on your point of view." But unfortunately the meaning "fester" is much more commonly known than the meaning "jewel". Before the novel was finished I had dinner with Jim, Marta Randall, and Elizabeth Lynn, and in the course of telling them about the novel, they wound up convincing me that to call the book CARBUNCLE would be somewhat like calling it FESTER. So I finally gave in and re-named it. I have to admit that I like THE SNOW QUEEN better than CARBUNCLE now myself. Somehow it's even hard to imagine why I ever wanted to call it anything else.

THRUST : The publication of THE SNOW QUEEN has been delayed for "promotion" reasons. Have you been happy with the handling of it at Dell?

VINGE : Actually the promotion that's being done by Dial Press right now -- they're the publishers of the hardback, which is part of the Quantum Books of line. Dell will be doing the paperback in about a year from now, and that will be a whole different set of ads. I was a little disappointed that the book wouldn't be published sooner; but on the other hand, it originally would have been done in the fall of 1979, which wouldn't have given it much time to be seen before award nominations closed. Spring is a better springboard, so to speak. They also hoped that by delaying the book longer they'd have more time to collect some good quotes for their advertising, and that worked out better than I could have hoped, since they got a quote from Arthur C. Clarke. They also decided on another cover for the book during that extra period of time, and the one they ended up with, by Leo and Diane Dillon, is one that really delights me (I haven't been entirely happy with some of my other book covers). I've been a fan of the Dillons' work for years. So by and large the delay worked out for the best all around (because of the quotes and the Dillon cover, Dial decided to spend more on advertising the book too). It began to feel like I'd written the book about a century ago by this winter, but now that it's out at last I'm glad they waited, and I certainly feel like they had my best interests at heart.

THRUST : It sounds like you are hopeful about sf as a vehicle for communicating change. Do you believe that the field is successfully escaping the "tunnel vision" of the limited, maleist viewpoint?

VINGE : Definitely. I have been very surprised, favorably, by the change that has come over science fiction. It helps renew my faith in it as the literature of possibilities, and flexibility, and the future -- the literature of change, hopefully for the better. Now, if somebody would just do something about sf art, I would be ecstatic. It is de-

finitely lagging behind the prose as far as righting the wrongs of sexual discrimination.

THRUST : Then the DiFate drawing, in *Analog* for THE OUTCASTS..., of Bird Allyn in overalls must have been especially meaningful.

VINGE : I really liked that drawing of Bird Allyn and Shadow Jack, it came very close to my own mental image of them. I am sure it is true that sf art is usually done to sell rather than honestly represent the story, especially on book covers. I resent that, but there does not seem to be a great deal we can do about it as writers. Intellectually I can understand that it is a matter of business, yet emotionally I also understand why few authors like their own covers.

THRUST : Do you ever fear that the strong interest in feminist sf, especially with the all female anthologies, might be falling prey to this particular publishers viewpoint? That after the women have achieved a balance, they might be relegated to the back seat of the bus again -- as far as what *sells* strongly?

VINGE : I do not foresee that happening; because I do not perceive women writers as a fad. The all-woman anthology may pass, but the acceptance of women as writers should go on as strongly as ever. Women write good science fiction, and they like to read it, and I think maybe its audience is becoming mature enough to realize that is what counts.

cont. on pg. 43

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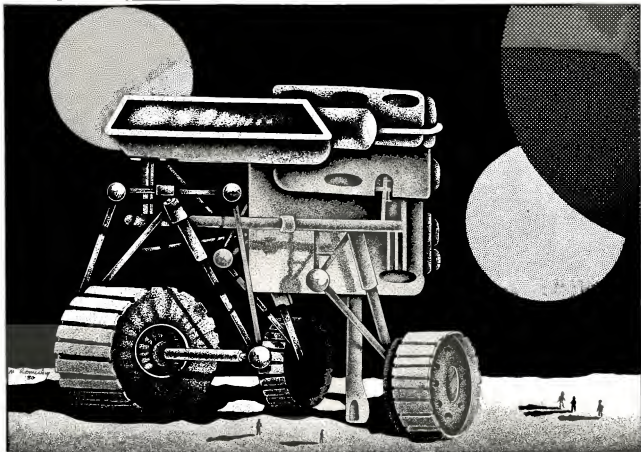
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"GENE WOLFE AS HERO"

MICHAEL BISHOP

1. an impossible faith

I am one of those incorrigible, i.e., insane, people who believe that even when struggling to pay the monthly rent, a genuine, by-God writer never sits down to the typewriter or the yellow legal pad without arbitrarily aiming to defenestrate Dante or shiver Shakespeare's timbers. For just this reason, I have sometimes strained mightily over (inadvertent) stinkeroos and burst blood vessels to bring forth (accidental) abominations. But since the beginning I have believed -- foolishly, foolishly -- that it is a reckless waste of time, not to mention a blot on the writer's escutcheon, to premeditate any work that is less than (a) a conspicuous advance over other efforts of its general kind or (b) a *sui generis* masterpiece.

Do not tell me that I ascribe to impossible standards, that I proselytize for an impossible

faith. I know that. Do not protest that my own canon is not the Big Gun I require to convert the heathen. I know that, too. But I believe what I believe, and sometimes, unexpectedly, I find doctrinal support for this impossible faith or a work of art that embodies its confirmation in actual fact. Recently I have found both.

Doctrinal support? William H. Gass, in an essay entitled "The Artist and Society" from his book Fiction and the Figures of Life, writes, "The aim of the artist ought to be to bring into the world objects which do not already exist there, and objects which are especially worthy of love. We meet people, grow to know them slowly, settle on some to companion our life. Do we value our friends for their social status, because they are burning in the public blaze?...calculate the usefulness of our husband or wife? Only too

often. Works of art are meant to be lived with and loved, and if we try to understand them, we should try to understand them as we try to understand anyone -- in order to know them better, not in order to know something else."

The work of art that has renewed my faith? The first volume of Gene Wolfe's tetralogy The Book of the New Sun. Entitled The Shadow of the Torturer (Simon & Schuster, 1980, 303pp., \$11.95), it happens to be, in Gass's distinctive terminology an object unlike any other that has achieved delivery into our world. It warrants attention, recognition, and love because its author has lavished his own best efforts on its creation, and because Gene Wolfe possesses a formidable talent. Fairly recently (June, 1980) I wrote a review of this novel for the Books section of the Sunday Atlanta Journal & Constitution. That review, altered for its appearance here, follows:

ii. "Fantasy no less riveting on second reading"

A publicity quote on the back of this novel reads, in part, "A book as protean as its author's talent. Adventure, pain, laughter, heartbreak. And...that literary rarity, wisdom. No one who values intelligence, strangeness, and beauty in the same piece of fiction is likely to finish The Shadow of the Torturer either dissatisfied or sated."

I totally concur with this unabashed eulogy, perhaps because I wrote it. I might add, however, that a second, more careful reading of Torturer has convinced me of the absolute correctness of this opinion, even that corny adventure-pain-laughter-heartbreak business.

Gene Wolfe is one of the most gifted writers in this country today. If you have never encountered his work before (perhaps because, like Ursula K. Le Guin, he has chosen a road to respectability landmined with prejudice: that of the fantasist and the science-fictioneer), this novel will strike you with the forces of revelation.

Set thousands of years in the future, Torturer is the first volume of a tetralogy entitled The Book of the New Sun, which Wolfe has already completed. (The second volume, The Claw of the Conciliator, was first scheduled to appear in 1981, but may appear in the fall of this year, with the third and fourth volumes following in the spring and fall of 1981 respectively.) However, this installment not only stands quite well on its own, but points to the likely magnificence of the remaining three books.

And, like 19th-century American readers who waited on the docks for the arrival of British ships bearing new chapters of those involving serials by Charles Dickens, you may find yourself panting irresistibly for further news of Severian the Torturer following his departure from the necropolis called Nessus.

"Here I pause," Severian tells us at the end of the first volume, "having carried you, reader, from gate to gate -- from the locked and fog-shrouded gate of our necropolis to this gate with its curling wisps of smoke, this gate which is perhaps the largest in existence, perhaps the largest ever to exist...Here I pause. If you wish to walk no farther with me, reader, I cannot blame you. It is no easy road." Easy or not, I am impatient to see where next Severian steps.

The story in this volume details the coming of age of young Severian in the loosely monastic confines of the hall of the Torturer's Guild, otherwise known as the Seekers for Truth and

Penitence. Their spartan bastille is an immense metal building that, Wolfe subtly, almost slyly discloses, was once a starship. Raised to inflict pain and death at the whim of the City's mysterious Autarch, Severian betrays his guild and suffers banishment to a provincial town where he is to serve as executioner. His crime, altogether significantly, is aiding a young woman scheduled for a grueling series of tortures to commit suicide.

Much of what occurs before Severian finds his way out of the variegated sprawl of Nessus is surreal, disorienting, and terrible. Wolfe's work appears to flow from such heterogeneous literary fonts as Poe, Dickens, Melville, Twain, Chesterton, and Borges, but in such rigorously transmuted proportions that he could easily, and with utter credibility, deny any or all of these ostensible "influences."

Suffice it to say that despite triggering echoes of several different writers and traditions, Torturer is unlike anything you have ever read before. It is at once episodic and involute, and how Wolfe accomplishes such astonishing alchemy, I leave you to discover for yourselves.

A note of caution: Wolfe's prose demands close attention. Put aside your preconceptions about novels cast in the format of a fantasy quest, for Torturer will yield only a portion of its bounty to speed-readers and toe-dippers. The novel is beautifully -- that is to say, evocatively -- written, and Wolfe has deliberately resurrected a great many archaic and/or rare words to "replace yet undiscovered concepts by their closest 20th-century equivalents." This is a stroke at once startling and brilliant, and it imparts to the novel the uncanny texture of reality. Severian's Nessus is as vivid as Oliver's London. To extend this note of caution, let me add that Wolfe does not scruple to indulge, usually both pertinently and memorably, his own quite meta-physical impulses.

Gene Wolfe is one of those writers -- there are several, not all of them fantasists -- who have been denied serious critical attention because they appear to write to category. I would like to predict that The Book of the New Sun, and this installment of that encompassing work, will secure Wolfe the reputation and the wider readership he so demonstrably deserves. But reality intrudes and I hesitate. However, I do not hesitate to say that he is an artist of the first order, and that if you choose to ignore this book, you will victimize not only its creator but yourself.

There. My axe -- I call it Terminus Est, after Severian's sword -- appears, finally, to have a gleaming edge. And it's long past time.

iii. "Never publish a bad book"

I have met Gene Wolfe once -- at a convention in Birmingham in the summer of 1977. In the coffee shop of the convention hotel, on a hot Sunday morning, the convention itself nearly over, a group of writers, spouses, and other fellow travelers sat desultorily over breakfast (or an unreasonable facsimile thereof) and chatted. What I principally remember about a portion of my conversation with Gene Wolfe is that he was then working diligently at The Book of the New Sun and that he did not intend to publish any part of it until he had completed the entire monumental project in draft. Although I am paraphrasing rather than quoting exactly, he said words to this effect: "It is never worth it to publish a bad

book, a book you could have made better. I'm working back and forth through the pages of *The Book of the New Sun* ironing out inconsistencies, trying to make it all fit. I'm not really sure when I'll be finished."

Again, I must emphasize that this provides the gist rather than the verbatim transcript of our talk, but I feel that one statement given here -- "It is never worth it to publish a bad book" -- is so close to what Gene Wolfe actually said that it functions as a pretty good summation of his artistic credo. The author as hero, to play with one of Wolfe's own playful titles ("The Hero as Werewolf"). As a consequence, in illustration of William H. Gass's dictum that the artist's role is to "bring into the world objects which do not already exist there, and objects which are especially worthy of love," Wolfe has written an astonishing number of stories and novellas that provoke not only our admiration but our affection. Some readers, it is true, have found his work puzzling, immune to easy glosses, and, as a result, disturbing rather than intoxicating -- but to thoughtful persons these very qualities signal not the author's incompetence or perversity but the depth of his commitment to the aesthetic reality of his creations.

What I am laboring today is that Wolfe absolutely refuses to take the easy way out. He refuses to succumb to cliché, faddishness, or flash. If his stories sometimes puzzle (and they do), the explanation lies fairly near to hand: Wolfe never brings a simplistic approach to the innate multiplicity of his subject matter, which is Life. Further, one of his most persistent interests is human psychology -- think for instance, of "The Death of Doctor Island," "The Fifth Head of Cerberus," "The Eyeflash Miracles," and easily a dozen more. And what, ultimately, is more complex, baffling, and fascinating than the human mind, or of more immediate concern to us in our daily lives?

As a result, Wolfe often produces stories with open-ended conclusions, characters who are neither wholly heroic nor unrelentingly villainous, and plot lines as dependent on the ebb and flow of the protagonist's mental state as on the tides and tumults of physical action. Because Wolfe usually employs a linear storytelling structure, however, a reader may get several pages into one of his narratives before realizing that the author is playing by a set of askew but stringent rules of his own devising. The impatient and the hidebound throw up their hands, but readers hungry for a new aesthetic experience hang around to confront and usually to come to terms with the puzzle -- invariably a human one -- embodied in these narratives. Wolfe plays an unorthodox variety of hardball on a regulation diamond, but he always plays fair.

Here I should add that *The Shadow of the Torturer* strikes me as an immediately accessible book for anyone with moderate intelligence and the ability to read. (Certainly, it does not present some of the problems of interpretation that *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*, a collection of three interrelated novellas, has posed the wary and the unwary alike.) The prose -- but for Wolfe's capable use of a wide variety of unusual terms -- speaks with the utmost clarity, and the action unravels with nary a glitch, hitch, or hiccup. However, Severian, despite his attachment to a somewhat unsavory guild, is a sympathetic character with whom most readers are going to have little trouble identifying; his struggles to find himself, to make his way

in a society structured toward certain impersonal ends, are our struggles, too.

Therefore, despite my refusal to predict that *The Book of the New Sun* will win Gene Wolfe wider recognition outside the field, I am hopeful that it will do just that, and that those of us who spend perhaps more time than we should lolling in front of the unicorn and spaceship sections of our favorite bookstores will accord it a wholly enthusiastic welcome. At this point in the year the only other sf or fantasy novel that seems to me equivalent in quality to *Torturer* is Gregory Benford's *Timescape*, a stunning book conceived and executed within the rigorous parameters of the hard sciences. Indeed, the appearance of these two novels in the same year once again throws into question all those exacting procedures by which we contrive to pin a "best" label on self-sufficient products of the creative imagination -- but that's another story altogether, and I had better not get into it here. My purpose, after all, is not to trumpet Gene Wolfe by disparaging others, but to induce some of you who have not yet given his work a thoughtful look to begin that exciting initiation procedure with *The Shadow of the Torturer*.

iv. baying at the wolfe, or the wolfe at bay

In a pair of disorganized letters written last June I asked Gene Wolfe some questions about *The Book of the New Sun*, and he made a valiant, if sometimes oblique, effort to answer a few of these:

Q. What are the titles of the last two books in the series?

A. The third and fourth volumes will be *The Sword of the Lictor* and *The Citadel of the Autarch*.

Q. The members of the Torturer's Guild are recruited from the children of the guild's victims. As a consequence, the boys raised in its hall have no parents but their masters and no siblings but their fellow apprentices and journeymen. Will we, during the course of the tetralogy, discover the identity of Severian's parents.

A. Only if you pay attention.

Q. The Chatelaine Thecia, who takes her own life to avoid the agonies of further torture, is a beautiful and affecting character. At one point in this first volume -- I can't remember where now -- there is a hint that she will reappear later on. Perhaps too cleverly I have wondered if her name comes from *thecla*, meaning the outer covering of the pupa of certain insects. Will Thecia undergo a resurrection or metamorphosis in a subsequent book? Has she perhaps done so already?

A. That depends on how you define those terms.

Q. Come on, Gene, can't you give a little on this one? I'm not asking you to give a Yes or No response to abortion or busing.

A.

Q. All right. I give up. How long did it take you to write *The Book of the New Sun*?

A. I started in 1975 (the summer, I think), and I'm currently giving volume three its final draft.

Q. The opening of *Torturer* reminds me of the opening of *Great Expectations*. Pip in the graveyard and all that. Orson Scott Card in a review in *Destinies* noticed this apparent similarity, too. Was the parallel intentional?

A. It's remarkable -- to me, anyway, since I had no intention of doing it -- how I seem to have suggested Dickens. A woman wrote from Texas saying that she compared the opening paragraph with David Copperfield. I've read



a good deal of Dickens, I admit, and I certainly like him.

Q. One of the most interesting of the archaic words that you employ in *Torturer* is *fuligin*, which you define as the color of the Torturer's Guild, the color that is darker than black. Severian wears a cloak of *fuligin*. You also use the word *fulguration* -- a flashing -- to describe the kind of torture dealt by one of the machines in the guild. Did you happen to hit upon these two words at the same time, thumbing through a dictionary?

A. I'm not sure I understand the question about *fulguration*. If you're asking whether *fuligin* (the color) came from that word, no, it did not. It came from the not-uncommon word *fuliginous*, which means sooty. *Fuligin* is the Latin for soot. I'm delighted that you like the idea.

Q. An exchange of letters is a hazardous way of carrying on an "interview." No, I didn't believe that *fulguration* came from *fuligin*, but I wondered if maybe the proximity of the two in the dictionary had anything to do with your discovery of them. In one letter I believe you said that many of these unusual words were part of your working vocabulary, and yet I felt that there must have been times when you deliberately went looking for them.

A. I don't really think that I said that *all* the archaic words came to me at need. Yes, I did go looking for them sometimes. What I think I said was that most of them came from reading,

and that when I was writing *The Book of the New Sun* I spent a lot of time trying to find out how they were spelled. The spelling had to be right, as it turned out, because the copy editors pretty much throw up their hands on these words.

Q. Okay, good, that clarifies the matter for me.

A. I have the feeling that I'm being very stupid about your question regarding *fulguration*, though. I don't think this will help, but once I thought of the torturer idea, I thought of making his cloak a perfect, dull black so that he could sneak around at night (if I ever needed for him to) without being seen. (There were a couple of other considerations, too, that I don't want to go into here.) I then thought of the word *fuliginous* (which I vaguely remembered but could not spell -- as I'm sure you already know, I am a very poor speller), looked it up and discovered *fuligin*.

Q. But not *fulguration*, by serendipity, at the same time?

A. I don't believe so. Are you thinking of the Revolutionary, the instrument of torture used on Thecia? No, it didn't come from *fulguration*, but from the convulsions suffered by mental patients in shock therapy. They bite their tongues and so on, if not restrained. I took a couple of courses in adnomnal psyche. once.

Q. The chapter in *Torturer* entitled "The Hut in the Jungle" perplexes me. I feel I'm missing something significant, failing to understand Severian and Agia's encounter with the naked man who behaves so erratically. Would you like to help me out?

A. I'm afraid "The Hut in the Jungle" has no particular meaning. It was just written to entertain, and if it failed to do that, it failed altogether.

Q. No, it did not fail to entertain. It simply left me wondering if you were taking an oblique course to a hidden end. You deny that, however. I don't suppose you'd care to comment further.

A. Q. Well, that's what I thought. What if I told you that although I have upteen dozen other questions to ask you, I'm not going to be able to frame them for fear of missing Doug Fratz's deadline for *Thrust* No. 16? What would you say?

A. Boy, am I glad that's over!
Q. Gene, it's unseemly for a man of your years and reputation to jump up and down. One final observation: Simon & Schuster commissioned Don Matz to do the jacket painting for *Torturer*, and it's a stunning piece of work: the protagonist on an elevated executioner's play-form wrapped in his *fuligin* cloak, his face eerily masked and his sword *Terminus Est* in his hands. Any reaction?

A. Yeah, I love the cover. Didja notice the scoreboard?

Well, the truth is that I had not, not, at least, until Gene pointed it out to me. One of these days I intend to ask the questions that I did not have time to put to him in June. Moreover, I intend to extract the answers from him. We honorary members of the Seekers for Truth and Penitence have our ways. And we also have a scoreboard.

My Column TED WHITE



I've been a fantasy fan since I was old enough to understand the stories that were read to me. The stories my mother read to me were fairy tales, Winnie the Pooh, and the Land of Oz, the latter because I found a copy of the book in a local library and insisted on it (the illustrations completely captured me). The first book I ever read for myself was Jack the Giant Killer. Once I discovered I could read and that reading could take me into fantasy worlds there was no stopping me. It was not until I was in fourth grade and had completely exhausted all the local sources of fantasy (including the Lang-edited "color" series of fairy-tale books and all the Oz books then in print) that I turned to more mundane types of fiction like the Rover Boys, the Hardy Boys, et al.

So fantasy was first. In third grade I discovered science fiction (John Keir Cross' The Angry Planet) and in fourth grade Heinlein (Rocketship Galileo), but even then I recognized sf's kinship with fantasy and I included it under the same umbrella.

I mention all this in order to provide a context for what I have to say about fantasy, circa 1980.

This year I am one of five judges for the World Fantasy Awards. As such, I have been exposed to more fantasy, in a more concentrated dose, than I was in ten years of editing Fantastic magazine.

Obviously I can say nothing about the works which are presently under consideration for the World Fantasy Awards but this concentrated exposure to fantasy has given me some ideas which I would like to discuss.

#

Even as a child I never cared much for what I'd describe as "gothic fantasy" -- a tradition which can easily be traced back to Poe (whose detective stories I preferred) and which reached its culmination in Lovecraft and his silly ilk. Even then I sensed that there was something nameless about Lovecraft and his followers, a something which, if I could indeed put a name to it I might characterize as, um, preadolescently morbid. "To say nothing of its prolix qualities, with overripe prose all but rotting on the page."

Nearly twenty years ago Avram Davidson pointed out that Lovecraft was essentially a sick man writing for a sick audience -- and some of the more rabid members of that fetid audience left up and all but crucified him.

No doubt I can expect to hear from them myself, soon.

As all of Lovecraft's biographers -- even the kindest -- have pointed out, the man was in sad shape. Dominated by elderly women, he lived an ersatz life in which he related best to people on paper, could not make a go of a marriage, apparently never had an adult sexual relationship and was obsessively morbid as well as narrowly-mindedly prejudiced about race and associated topics. His stories were undoubtedly a necessary catharsis, but I have always felt that they were best read as case studies of the outpourings of a diseased mind, and certainly not as fiction to be enjoyed or emulated.

It appears to me that Lovecraft's emotional development must have been arrested in a pre-adolescent stage. Once this is considered, most of his obsessive themes make a lot more sense. Fear of female sexuality runs subliminally through most of his work, as does the pre-adolescent fear of adult responsibilities, and adult relationships. There is a peculiar kind of morbidity common to preadolescents -- born out of early fears which have yet to be laid to rest by the development of adult perceptions of reality; morbid fears of nameless, unknown things in the dark, of monsters lurking under the bed, which is in reality a fear of one's parents' sexual relationship and its implications. (Talk to any child -- and to many adults -- who are aware to some extent of "fucking," and tell that child, "Your parents do it, you know," With few exceptions the child will forthrightly deny it, even faced with the evidence in the form of the child itself. "My parents wouldn't do that!" Children sense two things. One is that their parents do something together in the dark from which the child is excluded and which is hidden from the child. The other is that sex, once they encounter the concept -- which they usually do, if only in conversations with schoolmates, by six or seven -- is something not well understood, but unclear, "dirty," and often confused with semi-related

concepts like being tied up, tortured, or humiliated in some way. To the extent that the child's parents are secretive and covert about their own sexual relationship, the child gets a more distorted view of what's going on and of the reasons why the child is not being let in on the Big Secret. For some children, and I suspect Lovecraft was one such, sexuality becomes connected with morbidity.

In the early sixties Lin Carter showed me the opening lines of a manuscript which had been given to him by a teenage Lovecraft fan. Those lines are still engraved on my memory:

"Red blood dripped from her nude flayed breasts."

Sick. Worse than sick, because the author was proud of his story and those implications in it of which he was aware.

For years that individual (who dressed in black and somehow succeeded in presenting himself as prematurely middle-aged, despite his adolescence) summed up in my own mind everything that is wrong with Lovecraft and his fans.

People whom I otherwise respect have managed to enjoy Lovecraft with a considerably less debilitating effect, so you must not take my comments here as a total condemnation of those who do enjoy Lovecraft. But I would venture to say that Lovecraft's primary appeal is to that fearful child which lurks within many of us still, and if Lovecraft does not touch me it may be simply because I exorcised that demon without his assistance.

Still, I continue to regard it as a blemish on the character of my otherwise flawless friends when they confess to me their fondness for Lovecraft.

Lovecraft contaminates fantasy. Because his own sickness was so pervasive, his work has had the power to corrupt generations of followers, most of whom seem willing to surrender not only their talent but their individuality as creative artists at his altar. Thus, for more than forty years after Lovecraft's death people of both greater and lesser talent have devoted themselves to "the Lovecraft Mythos," and the ghoulish feeding off the dead body of his work.

I've never been entirely comfortable with literary ghouls -- those people, some of whom are motivated by money, but more of whom seem to be motivated by a sincere love of the artist whose work they've expropriated, who take the characters and concepts of other writers and use them as if they were their own. I don't care for Farmer when he does Doc Savage or Tarzan (and this has nothing to do with my own indifference to Tarzan or teenaged infatuation with Doc Savage), for instance. And I all but loathe the works of those who have sought to perpetuate Lovecraft's madness with none of his twisted genius for the job. Let these poor fools mine their own personal veins of insanity; their ersatz Lovecraft is a genuine abomination, the more so because -- unlike Lovecraft -- it's hollow at the core.

Two other people have also unwittingly polluted the fantasy field -- not with their own works, but by inspiring others to follow in their wakes. I'm referring to Robert E. Howard -- another genuinely sick man who committed suicide when his mother died, and who lived a vicariously adventurous life in his fiction to compensate for a depressingly dull life in the middle of nowhere -- and J.R.R. Tolkien, who by all accounts was a civilized academic gentleman.

In each case, the problem has been caused by the popularity of their works, rather than by the essential nature of their works. Popularity breeds imitations.

I read Lord of the Rings around 1960. I had read P. Schuyler Miller's raves about the books as each in turn was published, and I think Anthony Boucher had also given them glowing reviews (in Antagonism and WFSF, respectively). I noted them in my mind as books to be read some day, but since the reviewers had made clear the fact that each of the first two books was a cliff-hanger, I was in no hurry to start reading them; I would wait until all were available (they were published, if memory serves, roughly a year apart -- one hell of a long serial...).

One day Tom Condit, a fan of that era, a contributor upon occasion to Void (the fanzine Greg Benford and I published -- not that Australian rip-off), and a friend of mine, knocked at my apartment door.

"Ted," he said, "I haven't gone to work in two days. I've been reading Lord of the Rings, and I couldn't stop! I took it with me yesterday on my way to work and I was reading it on the subway and when I got to my stop I went and sat down on a bench in the station to finish the chapter, and when I realized an hour later that I was still there I went up to the street, walked over to Washington Square Park, found a seat, and kept on reading. I've been up all night reading it, and I just finished! Wow! Ted, you have to read this! Here!" And he thrust all three volumes (hardbound) at me.

I still have them. I read them myself at a somewhat less frenetic pace, but I did read them straight through, with pauses only for those necessary aspects of daily life.

What was really great about Tolkien for me then was that Lord of the Rings gave me the same frisson of mingled pleasure and excitement which I'd gotten as a child from fairy tales. The book was a fairy tale for adult readers.

We forget, too often, that fairy tales were not originally children's tales; that they have been reduced to juvenile fare by the sensibilities of our modern materialistic age. Fairy tales were part of the oral tradition of storytelling which dominated the pre-literate, pre-printing-press days of history. Indeed, as Lin Carter perceptively pointed out years ago in his book on Tolkien, fantasy was the literature of the time until only a few hundred years ago.

The fact that most of us are exposed to fairy tales as young children has tended to mean that we think of them solely in that context -- something for kids, something you read to a child who hasn't yet learned to read.

But fairy tales are archetypes, and they tell us basic truths about ourselves and the world in which we live. The mechanistic, materialistic worlds of the Industrial Age made the truths of fairy tales either obsolete, or apparently inappropriate.

There was obviously an awakening hunger for fairy tales -- and the truths they told -- in modern-day adults. Nothing else explains the increasingly enormous popularity of Tolkien's work. It has become fashionable for modern cynics in af, like Moorecock and Ellison, to disparage Tolkien. But unlike Lovecraft and Howard, Tolkien was not a panderer. He did not appeal to our baser aspects, but rather to our sense of idealism. He self-consciously

manipulated the archetypes and recreated the clash between Good and Evil, Order and Chaos, making use of the classic materials of myth and fairy-tale.

Unfortunately, what Tolkien took years to write was not, once he'd laid down guideposts, that hard to imitate. Tolkien, for all his philogistic bent, was not that good a prose craftsman -- he is hard to read aloud, for instance, and that's a telling test of good prose. Nor was his obsessive interest in genealogies and battles a positive aspect of his work. He was an amateur, in all the senses, best and worst, of that word.

But publishers read sales figures. And Tolkien sells.

Thus, *The Sword of Shannara* and *Elfsire* and all the other Tolkien-clones, some of them sincerely motivated but produced by people inadequate to the task, others written by cynical hacks looking for big bucks. A genre of sorts has been created. Happily, the reading audience seems to be able to separate the wheat from the chaff, and several "big books in the Tolkien mode" have bitten the publishing dust ignominiously. In the end an ability to nose out that ineffable sense of "quality" on the readers' parts have done the job.

I only wish the same was true where Howard is concerned.

I have considerably more respect for Howard as a writer than I do Lovecraft, despite the fact that I'm not fond of Conan. It strikes me as an amusing coincidence that those two were, at least briefly, contemporaries who were both published in *Weird Tales* (a badly overrated horror pulp, most of the thirty-year history of which was filled with stories that verged on unreadability and are now long-buried and easily forgotten).

Howard was then antithesis of Lovecraft in so many ways: Lovecraft's milieu was the foggy coast of New England and its clamminess pervades his stories. Howard lived in Texas, and his stories have a frontier-justice simplicity to them. No one is very clever in a Conan story, and no one needs to be. Might makes right.

Don Wollheim revived Howard briefly in one of the first of the Ace Doubles, but it wasn't yet time for a Howard revival. Howard underwent a second revival in the sixties which was at least marginally more successful (I often thought that Frank Frazetta's covers were the deciding factor in the success of the Lancer editions; a point born out by the poorer sales of those books which had inferior, non-Frazetta covers), but the real turning point was Conan's invasion of the comics.

I was around and hanging out with Roy Thomas when Roy succeeded in getting Marvel to do Conan, and I recall quite vividly Roy's enthusiasm for Conan and the sincerity of his dedication to bringing Conan into comics. He wanted to "do Conan right," and within the limitations of the medium (and the Comics Code Authority) he succeeded, especially in the first twenty or so issues that were drawn by Barry Smith.

When Lin Carter and L. Sprague de Camp offered me a Conan story for *Fantastic* I was initially dubious. Take off Conan's name and there was nothing special about that story (it could as easily have been one of Lin's Thongor stories), and I recall thinking while copyediting it that this sword-and-sorcery stuff was pretty simple, and not very hard to write. I decided to publish that story for two reasons: First, Conan was by then a viable commercial property, and the editor of a magazine has to consider

such things. Second, I had long admired de Camp, and I wanted to encourage him to contribute to *Fantastic* (which he was then also doing with his excellent column of biographies, "Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers").

It was a smart move. When Conan's name appeared on an issue's cover, *Fantastic's* sales went up by 50% (from, admittedly, the rather low base of around 20,000 copies). Once I was aware of that I didn't quibble over Conan stories any more. They were helping to keep the only fantasy magazine on the newsstands alive, and that was a small price to pay. Indeed, I sometimes got a chuckle out of the fact that Conan sold *Fantastic* so well. I enjoyed thinking of those ten thousand extra readers encountering the other stories in the issue, like Richard Sneed's "The Cosmic Kid."

But, really, how far can you take Heroic Fantasy about iron-thewed barbarians? (The depths have not been fully plumbed yet. The Conan movie has yet to appear, and god knows what will follow in *its* wake!) Grant Howard's Conan some originality if you will, but the genre is a narrow one. It seems, indeed, almost ideally suited to Marvel comics, since the typical Conan story is just one long battle after another, the resolution brought about by brawn rather than brains. (Those of Roy Thomas's adaptations I've read are actually a cut above that description, embodying as they do some wit and cleverness.)

Certainly none of Conan's imitators, from Thongor to Brak (!) the Barbarian, have equalled, much less improved upon, the original.

But of course the fantasy field itself is much broader than Lovecraft, Tolkien and Howard, although those three typify it to entirely too many people, publishers and authors among them. What of the rest?

Ursula Le Guin did it best, I thought, with her Earthsea series. She made use of nearly all the archetypes of fairy tales, wrote stories timeless and ageless in appeal (they were originally marketed as "juveniles," but no adult was ever embarrassed by reading one), and, most important, she used them to say things about the human condition.

In her wake have come a flurry of female fantasy novelists, some of them of considerable merit, and some of them contemptably bad.

Recently I was sent for review a book by an author I shall let remain nameless, since I intend to hold her up to public scorn and vilification. Her book carries enthusiastic blurbs from writers I respect. ("Read this!" -- Marion Zimmer Bradley. "I am totally enthralled... worth reading several times over" -- Andre Norton. "A fine poet she is!" -- Katherine Kurtz.) I was prepared to like the book.

It's a stinker. I have no idea how good her ideas are, but a fine poet she isn't. I never got past the first two pages. The book opens like this:

"The Forest was the abode of warlocks, folk said, and goblins, and other creatures even worse. Still, Alan bent his staggering steps toward the Forest, as a desperate man will. Robbers had stripped him of everything -- horse, weapons, even his clothing. The peasants could not spare him more than a beggar's crust. But within the Forest wilderness, Alan hoped, he might be able to find something to eat and a covering for his naked body."

That's one hell of a bad way to start a book. Already we know that the apparent



protagonist, Alan, is a fool who is too stupid to survive on his own and will require divine (or auctorial) intervention if he is to last out the book. Consider: robbed and beaten, Alan doesn't even cop a shred of clothing from a farmer, nor does he attempt to rest his weary body in a haystack. Apparently stealing eggs or some other food never occurred to him, and he wasn't willing to apprentice himself to a farm in return for bed or board. He's a naive jerk, and my quick perusal of the following page or two only reinforced that image.

As we continue it becomes apparent that the author can't visualize scenes well (someone comes along and slaps him on the back with the flat of his sword from horseback and he hadn't even noticed until he was struck, although the horse had to be all but trampling him) and her writing is on par with that in those earnest fanzines published to present the works of aspiring, but not yet professional authors.

Wondering if it got better later on, I opened the book at random to the middle, where I found this poetic passage:

"It is of such men that legends are made," replied Craig gravely. "And I think it is not all nonsense." He ran his appraising eyes over them both.

"I do not wear this shield in (sic) policy, Craig," Hal told him sharply. "It was given to me."

"I did not think otherwise," Craig declared.

Well, I expostulated pretty surely when I read that. Then I threw the book across the room, "in policy," you might say.

This is dreadful prose, the sort of thing which has no business being published in the first place, but which some people (Bradley, Norton, and Kurtz for three) have seen fit to rave over, and the book is from a major house and will get a major promotional push.

Why? Why is dreadful rot like this being published? Because publishers have heard that fantasy is the In Thing this year?

Had not this Column already grown so long I would have devoted at least equal space to Clifford Simak's travesty of fantasy, Fellowship of the Talisman, a Del Rey book for which I foolishly spent money in memory of so many fine Simak sf novels. In that book the characterization is equally wooden, the action idiotic, and the prose substandard.

Don't get me wrong. I love fantasy. But I'm quickly ODing on the wretched stuff being served up to us as fantasy these days. Most of it is sub-literate garbage written, I am convinced, by stary-eyed amateurs and published with a cynical eye on the buck.

Maybe after the World Fantasy Awards are over I'll be able to report to you on some of the better stuff the fantasy field has produced lately.

Then again, I may never want to see or hear the word "fantasy" again.

In Thrust #14 a reader named Gary Williamson addressed the following query to me: "To Mr. White: If Scott's books aren't selling well how did both Hot Sleep and A Planet Called Treason make the Locus best seller list? Maybe White and Brown are just jealous."

I get the feeling that Gary thinks he really showed both Steve Brown and myself up for the silly fools that he thinks we are. Wrong, Gary.

The Locus best seller list doesn't have any real meaning at all.

A book could be a publishing disaster and still make the Locus best seller list. Why? How? Simple:

The list is compiled from data furnished by around twenty bookstores scattered around the country, all but one of which are specialty sf stores. These stores sell, en masse, a tiny percentage of the total number of sf books sold. If a book sells twenty copies in a single-month period through one of these stores it will probably be reported as a major seller by that store. But even if it sold, say, twenty copies in every one of these stores, the total sales of that book would still be under 500, despite having earned a position on Locus's list. And that total sale would be insignificant in terms of the number of copies printed (probably 60,000 to 75,000).

The same holds true for sf magazines. Some specialty bookstores regularly sell large amounts of copies of certain magazines -- perhaps twenty to fifty an issue -- but these sales do little to mitigate much poorer nationwide sales on the newsstands. Although specialty shops are starting to have more significance for publishers, they are a small part of the overall picture.

When the paperback of Anne McCaffrey's White Dragon was published, it received a major push from its publisher and copies of it appeared in droves on drugstore display racks, right next to the major sellers, stacked to cover a display area at least equal to six copies placed side by side, and it appeared in the supermarket racks in equal profusion. Now, that book sold. (It also did very well in the specialty shops, needless to say.) The book made major best-seller lists, sold very well, and made both authors and publisher very happy. The fact that it appeared on Locus's list as well was an amusing laginappe.

I haven't seen royalty statements on either Hot Sleep or A Planet Called Treason, but I've heard reports of mediocre sales. I find nothing in those books' appearance on Locus's list that contradicts the reports I heard.

ESSAYING: Doctor Who



David Bischoff

Star Wars is adolescent nonsense; Close Encounters is obscurantist drivel; 'Star Trek' can turn your brains to purees of bat guano; and the greatest science fiction series of all time is Doctor Who! And I'll take you all on, one-by-one or all in a bunch to back it up!

The music rams out of your tinny TV speaker full force, first note: a galvanizing tuneful electronic throbbing. A flashing, spiralling graphic corridor of 2001-type space/time colors. A British police call-box — like a Victorian telephone booth with no windows — comes whooshing through the phosphor dots, a delightful anachronism, symbolizing the anarchy to come. A face fades in, superimposed over the maelstrom. The eyes flash with intelligence; but, wreathed in wrinkles, they stare out in a kind of humorous, challenging bemusement. A long scarf is wrapped around the neck. The hair is mass of long curls. This guy looks like Harpo Marx on drugs.

FADE OUT CHEST SHOT

Slipping out from the eye of this video hurrican comes the Title graphic, a bold kind of Superman art-deco:

DOCTOR WHO

No, that's not his name, this odd-looking guy in the plaid woolen vest, and long Edwardian overcoat. His name is simply 'The Doctor', perhaps the best original character ever created for science fiction.

He's here to save the universe, and entertain the hell out of you.

The first exposure of the Doctor on American TV screens was in the summer of 1973. As it happened, I missed them all. I was in England at the time, the place where they're produced. Of the five months I spent away from the States, at least half of it was in London. I'd just graduated from the University of Maryland with a degree in Radio, Television and Film, a major inspired by my passion for British Television. I wanted to invest much of my time in England watching the BBC and independent stations, but as I was staying largely at youth hostels and a vagabond campsite (Tent City — a place visited by the esteemed editor of this journal as well the same summer. Remember, Doug?) I had to find someplace to watch TV at. I discovered the British Student Centre, an establishment just across Regents Street from the Central BBC

building. Actually, it was mostly for foreign students — particularly Iranians. They had two excellent color TV sets, one tucked away in the basement, almost ignored by most of the other users of the facilities. I'd buy a cup of tea at the cafeteria for three pence (about ten cents) and spend an afternoon or an evening glorying in English TV.

Now, I won't get gonzo here; I'm trying to control myself from spewing praises for liveaction. There are several essential differences from the American boobtube fare that should be stated, however, that explains the superiority. Whereas most of American commercial television is an extension from the national obsession with films, and therefore filmed, British TV is largely done on videotape. In the days of *The Forsythe Saga*, exteriors were done on film; now, thanks to minicams and the like, outside scenes can be done on videotape. In fact, these days, anything you can do with film, you can also do with videotape. Film is glossier and slicker; but videotape, in my opinion, has more of a sense of *aliveness*, of direct experience. Colors seem richer and more varied, more lifelike. I find, in properly lit compositions, a far superior sense of depth.

British TV is rarely fed a diet of theatre-trained actors and producers: good ones who've had to survive the arduous process of learning to perform in live theatrics. Hence, the acting is largely a cut above American acting. British production generally have a terrific sense of class and control.

There are, of course, other elements, including generally more literate approaches to both comedy and drama, but this piece is about *Doctor Who*, which is an entirely different kettle of Daleks. Still, it's executed with the kind of professional aplomb and confidence one tends to expect from British TV. All of the episodes I've seen use a mix of video-tape and film, heavy on the former. The difference is the incredible use of video-tape for special effects. Not that it *looks* all that good. Video-tape technology is far behind film. But with a little bit of disbelief suspension, it looks just fine.

One Saturday afternoon, before dinner and a trip to the theatre, and lo and behold I happened to catch an episode of *Doctor Who*. It's format is like nothing ever done on American TV. Quite simply, it's a serial. A kid's serial, air late on Saturday afternoon, with half-hour segments. The average length of a story is generally four episodes, which is just right: feature film length. I think I caught a middle episode of a serial, and was rather impressed. Jon Pertwee was the Doctor then, elegant and poised. I confess I don't remember the plot, but I do remember enjoying it. A single aspect, however surmounted everything else in my evaluation upon the first impression:

Hey, This is *really* science fiction.

The dialog and concepts showed a real grasp of what had been established as the science fiction I read. It wasn't merely some committee's shoddy idea of what sf was; these people not only understood the infinite arena in which they worked, they obviously were approaching it with the verve and imagination which always tickled me in science fiction.

Not only that, they approached it with absolutely no condescension, no campiness, no disrespect. It was that rarest of entertainments: a show principally for young people that was just as enjoyable for adults or small kids for the same, and different, reasons. And a show that *said* something that communicated to everybody.

After returning to the U.S., I heard about

the short run of the show in the D.C. area from sf fans who'd enjoyed it. I regretted missing the shows, and promptly forgot about the whole thing.

Then, in 1978, *TIME-LIFE* picked up close to a hundred of the newest ones for U.S. syndication. I stayed in New York City that summer, and caught quite a few of the shows on WOR-TV channel 9. A new friend, Robin Snelson of *FUTURE LIFE* magazine, caught the fever as well, and still has it to this day. Alas, at that time WOR was only doling out one episode per Saturday, imitating the British method. Due to frequent trips back to Maryland for some peace and fresh air on weekends, I missed quite a few episodes. The mid-1980, channel 45 in Baltimore began to carry them *every afternoon*, as part of a kiddie show called *Captain Chesapeake* which was otherwise execrable. I subsequently moved to the Baltimore area for a part-time job, and faithfully watched the series, missing only a few stories. Then WOR was picked up by our cable company even as Doctor Who was dropped from WBFF-45, and I could keep on watching it at its new time there, ten AM Saturday morning, two episodes at a time.

These are the Tom Baker episodes up to 1978. Charles Sheffield, a frequent visitor to his homeland of England, told me that he thought that there was a *new Doctor* (Baker is the fourth in a series that is now seventeen years old) but subsequent investigation has proved him wrong. I noted recently at a comics shop in New York that Marvel is now releasing a weekly Doctor Who comic magazine with pictorials about the show, and as far as I can tell, Baker is still wearing the long scarf (which he tripped over early in his *Who* career, injuring himself and forcing a serial down to a mere two episodes...*"The Sonaran Experiment"*) and the floppy hat. In fact, he was evidently in attendance at Season in Brighton last year; yet another reason I regret not attending that convention.

So, who is the Doctor, and what is he doing stalking the hallways of a jaded sf writer's mind, jabbing occasionally at the old, frayed Sense of Wonder nerve, tickling the funny bone and generally resurrecting the ghost of adolescent enthusiasm for his type of adventure?

Not an uncomplicated answer to that.

The Doctor himself, though, is a Time Lord. Not your normal Time Lord, satisfied with lying back on home planet Gallifrey and watching the universe falling to pieces. No, the Doctor got angry at his fellow's indifference to the evil in the Universe, and lack of curiosity. So, he stole a TARDIS, an incredible device capable of travelling through both space and time (and occasionally alternate universes) with a flick of the controls. Alas, the one the Doctor happened to pick was the *Edsel* of the lot; faulty controls, and not very dependable. Thus, as often as not when directed someplace, it lands somewhere (and sometime) entirely surprising.

Spurred by his tremendous curiosity and desire to be of general help to those who need it (though often just trying to get himself out of a jam) the Doctor has travelled hither and yon through space and time, from strange planets to future and past Earths, also trailing glorious plots behind his like comet-tails. Often surprisingly intricate: if a plot demands more than four episodes, the producers stretch it. One of my personal favorites, for example, *"The Talons of Weng-Chiang"*, is a delicious 6 parter involving the Doctor's visit to Victorian London and Sax Rohmer Territory, with inscrutable, nasty Chinamen and all.

The Doctor's changes have not just been in Time and Space. Three quarters of a millennium old, he occasionally regenerates a new body and personality

overlay. This ingenious conceit allows for a change of Doctors every few years. For example, when Patrick Troughton, the Doctor of the mid-60's, had to finally call on the help of his fellow Time Lords, he was tried for the theft of the TARDIS (Time And Relative Dimensions in Space, acronym freaks) and in punishment exiled to Earth for a few years in different form (namely as Jon Pertwee). The first Doctor, William Hartnell, was an old chap who just lay down and changed. When Pertwee bowed out, the plotters riddled him with deadly radiation, forcing a regeneration into Tom Baker, alumnus of several Amdus horror movies, the villain of *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*, and the excellent Rasputin of *Nicholas and Alexandra*. Supposedly, he combines elements of the previous three Doctors, topping them all with a super tight-rope walk between seriousness and good-natured buffoonery which is endlessly entertaining. The writers supply him with just the right amount of amusing quips which Baker understates marvelously. His grin of delight is infectious, his obvious relish for the role a joy. He flops about each episode with a casual charisma that lights up the occasionally terrific studio sets. Beyond the necessary qualities of being a Good Guy, you see, the Doctor has many other quirky qualities. He can be stubborn, childish, playful, imperfect, prideful and charming all within a few minutes. He embodies one of the themes of the show: God is not necessarily boring.

Hardly less delightful are his female companions. It would seem that the Doctor has a penchant for picking up beautiful young women and carting them around with him. The relationships are played entirely Platonic, but I can't help but see little peripheral hints of the Sted-Peel combo of *The Avengers*. (Indeed, *Dr. Who* came before that show... and their influence upon one another seems implicit. The style, the class, the wit, bottomed by the essential seriousness of the plots. In both shows a stunning number of people are generally killed.) Though the Doctor isn't human, his conversation with women certainly is. Although the Doctor has gone through about a dozen of them, I've only encountered two of them. Sara-Jane Smith started with Jon Pertwee and stayed on for several years. A cuddly, bouncy little bit of femininity she nonetheless embodies certain emerging women's consciousness traits remaining lovable throughout. A pert brunette, her obvious intelligence and resourcefulness spark her actions, yet do not get in the way of occasional verbal faux-pas both more of innocent naivete than anything else.

Characteristic of the series, the parting of Sarah and the Doctor at the end of 'The Hand of Fear' is delightfully and touchingly written and played. After a particularly harrowing adventure, the TARDIS is headed back to modern day Earth, with the Doctor underneath the controls, repairing something. Sarah carried on about her weariness of monsters, villains, and foreign planets and her intense desire for a bath. She stomps off to pack her bag. The Doctor, meanwhile, hasn't heard a thing she's said. He's just been hit with an internal 'Call' to return to his home planet Gallifrey, to resolve some emergency. Sarah cannot come with him, and the sadness shows on his features as Sarah harumphs into the control room carrying a bag and a daffy potted plant. The Doctor delivers the news, and Sarah is shocked. The honest affection in their dialogue is clear. The Doctor aligns his coordinates for South Croydon, London: Sarah's home. He lands in the middle of a street, they say their farewells and the TARDIS disappears with its characteristic lurching noises.

Sarah looks around. "This isn't South Croydon!" She exclaims and shakes her head with exasperation and fondness as she trudges off to find out where she really is.

After defeating the Amster's (that dastard!) to destroy not only Gallifrey but the entire universe, in "The Deadly Assassin" the Doctor finds himself in more hot water on a strange planet inhabited by the Sevateen — pure savages — and the Tesh, all ancestors of an earth exploration ship. After resolving their difficulties, one of the Sevateen, a lithesome lass named Leela, takes a fancy to the Doctor and wants to come with him in the TARDIS.

LEELA: You do like me, don't you?

THE DOCTOR: Of course I do. I like many people, but I don't care them around the cosmos with me.

(LEELA, still in her brief animal skin costume, looks at the Doctor, then at the open TARDIS, and darts past the Doctor through the doors. Doctor Who looks a little peeved and turn around and enters the TARDIS to chuck her out.)

EXT. TARDIS

THE DOCTOR (from inside) Now, I told you, you can't... No! Don't touch that!

The TARDIS fades away into the next adventure. If Sarah-Jane happened to find a lot of trouble, then you might say that Leela looks for it. She carries around a nasty little blade, and kills anybody who looks cross-eyed at her. A real cookie, and not overly bright, she nonetheless does her share of monster-destroying and Doctor-saving. I was particularly amused at the adventure in which a space station is invaded by parasitic creatures who take over humans by preying on their thinking abilities. Leela is not affected. She is, the Doctor explains wryly, 'Only a mass of instinct and emotion.' Coy sexism; but Leela does save the day in that adventure.

One of my favorites is 'The Sunmakers' which could have been written by Keith Laumer (In fact, I'm sure that Robert Holmes, also the script editor for the Baker years, must be very familiar with modern science fiction authors.) Perhaps my all time favorite, however, is a Sarah-Jane adventure called 'The Brain of Morbius' crammed with sf and gothic atmosphere.

But they're all worthwhile, varied and seldom boring. It's obvious that the show doesn't have the biggest budget in the world. The video special effects are occasionally quite tacky. The acting sometimes is a little stiff; the dialog and plotting lean hard toward the cliched melodramatic. However, once one has Doctor Who fever, these faults almost become aspects of the shows boisterous charm. With the video technology of the day improving at a rapid pace, I suspect the shows being done now (as yet unimported to these shores) are much improved.

I suppose I admire Doctor Who so much for several reasons. To begin with, it somehow captures the excitement of science fiction, its innocence and bravura while at the same time handling the form with a delicate sophistication that never looks down upon the genre. Nary a yawn behind the cameras, nor a derisive chuckle, these people care about their audience, the adults as well as the kids.

Also, it captures my writer's envy. For as much as I admire Ursula Le Guin, say, or Thomas Disch or any of the truly fine writers of sf, none of their work makes me say, 'Gee. I wish I had written that.' Doctor Who gets me like that. Somehow it elicits a certain glee, an excitement about fiction and TV

as entertainment that makes me smile, makes me enthusiastic about the possibilities of the two mediums, and my place in them. I think, "Gosh, I wish I could write for Doctor Who." The same way I thought I would like to write science fiction when in my teens. The sort of emotional rather than intellectual urge which blends with my psyche to form a genuine good feeling about life.

Which relates to the final reason. Doctor Who is, on at least two levels a worthwhile show. First, and foremost, it diverts and entertains. It leaves you smiling and happy. The sort of thing you want to share with others.

Philosophically, the show constantly illustrates the far-reaching possibilities of the human imagination for its younger audience; a vital element of all adolescent-style sf, something that opens a mind up. If there is an overreaching message to the series, it is simply that true evil -- the lust for power -- is not merely bad. It's boring. As varied and colorful as the creatures are in Doctor Who, they generally have a common denominator -- they want to control something or somebody. In the end, for all their intensity and earnestness, they are essentially humorless things, almost pitiable. By contrasting them with the ideal, the Doctor, showing the endlessly variable shades between, the show makes constant satirical and pointed comments on the human condition, all the while in an essential statement of good will and optimism. It plays games with reality in the delightful manner that only sf and fantasy can do; and it's final message is, life is not merely worthwhile, it's great fun. It's full of nasty Daleks and grumpy slimy Zygons who would like to make it dreary and

dull. But if you care, you try to do the right thing, like the Doctor, it's all not just meaningful. It's a great bloody lark!

Pass the sonic screwdriver!

SCIENCE FICTION CHRONICLE

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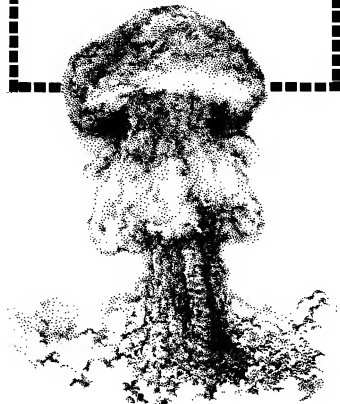
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A FINAL PARANOID CRITICAL STATEMENT JOHN SHIRLEY



Because my mother's practicality sometimes overwhelmed her aesthetics, she used to keep a jar in the refrigerator containing grease leavings from frypans. She used this for cooking when she ran out of Crisco. The gunk looked awful. It had a runny crust on top and under that was a mucouslike sludge which makes me shudder even in retrospective contemplation. This greasy gunk, it seems to me, has a quality not unlike certain flow levels of the popular media, certain key stratas of the entertainment industry. In *Women's Magazines*, the jar of grease is *Lady's Home Journal*. In *Gen Interest* mags, it's *Us Magazine*. In men's magazines, it's *Gentleman's Quarterly*. In children's mags it's *Boy's Life*. In TV talk shows it's a tie between Merv Griffin and Dinah Shore. In science fiction magazines, it's *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*.

The latest issue to be available at this writing is March '80, with the cover painting by Jack Gaughan showing a circus spaceship, illustrating the Barry Longyear story *THE BOOK OF BARABOO*. Circus-style paint or not, it's just another obligatory spaceship. Inside, the magazine's blandness becomes greasier yet. Asimov's neutral science column isn't something one can argue with. It's written that way, of course. It's mildly interesting. The fiction...

Maybe this is the special Sensitive Anthropological Cliches issue. Lots of stories like that here. *DARKMORNING* by Sydney J. Van Scyoc concerns the mutated descendants of colonists on a harshly cold alien world who've adapted by putting on fat and going into hibernation each winter. They accomplish this bliss with the help of a special herb which makes it possible for them to sleep and gives them disturbing dreams. The dreams amount to a kind of communing with the planet itself. *Black Elk Speaks* sort of thing. But some of their number aren't adapted, don't put on fat, and so die during the winter months. One of these is a malcontent who resents the hibernators because they aren't human, and because they survive and she doesn't. Eventually, a sort of natural selection kills this one off. The story peters out with the tedious philosophizing of the community's Wise Men, who explain that "true humans" are those who change to adapt to alien environments, who are destined (ta dah to dah) to carry mankind's Holy Seed to the stars. Nevermind that there's no need for people to hibernate to survive in a cold-hash world, since there are other ways, as the eskimos have proven; never mind the absurdity of the whole premise. Ultimately, we are told, the human race recreates itself in a new image. We are not told how a "new image" -- new physical form, new cultural and social and environmental imperatives, -- can still pass as an extension of the same damn race. It's as if the writer is trying to justify transformations, changes, evolution, (which need no apologies) by superimposing on these processes a specious racial commonality. We are obligated to go Out There and to survive any way we can. Manifest destiny in a new guise (speaking of putting old things in new guises).

Essentially it's the same old tear-jerking Man's Destiny is Amongst the Stars rhetoric. Safe rhetoric.

The filler on this story's last page is a limerick insipidly chuckling over the film *ALIEN*. Panzine stuff.

HERITAGE by Joanne Mitchell is a four page story which offers its humorous twist ending as repayment for our interest. I salled at the end -- and shrugged. A safe one.

MARTIAN WALKABOUT by F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre is a fairly interesting story, often well-written, about an Australian Aborigine's Terran Walkabout, and how the friendly-but-ignorant-of-communing-with-the-earth white men foil this walkabout, making it necessary for the aborigine to become a space astronaut so he can fulfill his destiny in the Martian desert...He was a young man, teens, on his first walkabout, and from there he goes onto become not only civilized, but an astronaut? Fat Chance. Such an adjustment after so many years of primitive conditioning is inconceivable. At obnoxious regular intervals in the story he injects the "silver notes" of the Dldjeridoo which is this:

OodaaOodaaOodaaOodaaOodaaOodaaOodaa...

He does this 20 times in this story. It's

something the Noble Savage is hearing in his mind. On Mars he is drawn to the tomb of a telepathic alien who tells him, essentially, that mankind's destiny is in the stars. Thematic. This one peters out too. The business about the aboriginal belief in the uses of dreams, and the rest of the researched background, is strong and feels authentic. The rest is cliché founded on an unlikely premise.

Hey, I thought this mag was supposed to be Science oriented. Asimov, right? But most of the science is what Geis calls Magic Science.

That's okay, though, in Rory Harper's story PSYCHO-STARS. Though it's badly titled, it's the book for me. It's about God come to earth, a God who announces His presence -- and the imminence of Signs and Portents, and who explains the universe in a nut shell to a hidebound Science writer. It happens I think some of Harper's whimsy is not so whimsical -- he may be right! But it's a funny story, and isn't quite so SAFE as the others. Why, probably three or four readers will find it marginally offensive.

Ardis Waters' STORYTELLER is about a group of people out to make their fortune on a nasty desert world where psychovores suck the souls from people who sleep. Someone who's good at spinning tales tells stories (which we aren't party to, but which we are assured are utterly fascinatingly told) and this keeps our heroes awake so they don't fall prey to...well, the story didn't keep me awake (though the style was very interesting indeed, and Waters may become a strong writer). The beleaguered group astonishingly resemble, in their tastes and conversation and attitudes, a group of fans at a convention. They're too goddamn cute and this story is too goddamn safe and how can the reader keep from being bored by the predicatability of it all? I knew what was going to happen two paragraphs in. But in order to fulfill his destiny amongst the stars, Scithers has to play it safe.

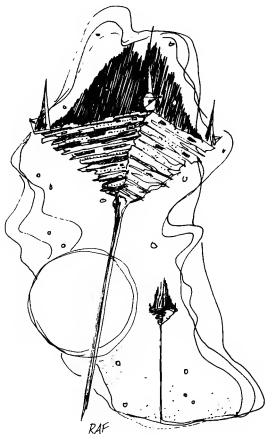
It's not that I want him to do particularly experimental stuff. It's that I'd like to see something that is not only carefully written (as most of these stories are not), not only well crafted (some of these formulas are well crafted), but also more than the usual hackneyed Star Trek themes idiomatically reworked. There's no challenge to anyone here. But a large and vocal percentage of the readership cries, "We don't want to be challenged! We want to be entertained!" As I've said repeatedly, it's possible to entertain with thoughtful, subtle writing. And with innovative writing. Look at Bester. But Scithers ceaselessly playing it safe. Nothing even remotely disturbing or controversial. (Except for maybe PSYCHO-STARS. And even that is carefully, safely whimsical). And when you're that safe, you're schlock.

Trouble is, Asimov's has a huge and growing circulation. People think that this is science fiction. And I fear that it is a major neutralizing influence on the field. It is a sort of convergence point for the field's various banalities and tired conventionalisms. It is influencing the others to be the same way. You know, you'd never see a story like THE ANGEL OF DEATH by Michale Shea in IASPM (it appeared in The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction). That's a tough story, a disturbing story, an entertaining story, and good sf. You may not see that sort of thing in PS&F anymore, because I suspect that Ferman is becoming more conservative in his buying, possibly because of the competition of Mags like Asimov's and Galileo and of course Analog. There may be

some hope in OMNI, Bob Sheekley is openminded and not obsessively cautious.

I've heard that Scithers thinks of Barry Longyear as his Big Find. If that's true, Longyear's work may well be the distillation of Scithers' editorial slant. So let's conclude, skipping a few stories, with Longyear's novella, THE BOOK OF BARABBOO.

The story revolved around a circus from earth which travels interstellar, from world to world. On a planet of large beetlelike creatures a rival circus tries to steal away the audience, and warfare breaks out between the two shows. It's a perfectly ordinary earth circus, with a big canvas tent that is put up by hand and so forth. Presumably they go to these lengths, pounding in stakes, to preserve the authenticity of the show. For tradition. Though this tradition would probably mean nothing to the various alien cultures they play to. We are also expected to believe that these far-future cultures are interested in ordinary 20th century style circus acts. High wire artists, clowns. A society of beetles part of a huge multi-cultured interstellar pangalactic civilization is going to be impressed by trapeze artists? But since the story is humorous in tone, I can make an effort and, nearly, suspend my disbelief. Except, as Longyear crowed in EMPIRE, all his stories are one-draft. This makes for some pretty uneven prose. Sometimes it's vivid and entertaining. I'll give him that. About as believable as Playboy Party Jokes. He'll set up a problem for the protagonists, and solve it with whatever comes to him as he's knocking out the story. For instance, someone noticed that the beetle creatures weren't paying attention to the circus posters (right, in this





far future society where a thousand new forms of media barrage should be available, they're using posters) and some genius realized that this was because the critturs walk bent over, staring at the ground, and see nothing higher, nothing on the walls. (Let's hope they have no traffic on their world, or there's aashed beetle everywhere. We don't know what sort of city they have, since Longyear never describes it.) So they put the sidewalk. Science fiction problem solving, see.

But I don't mind the implausibility, much. My stories win no prizes for plausibility. What I do mind is that sense that Longyear is serving up pabulum for a quick buck, is contemptuous of his readers and hence writes in one muddly draft, and writes at a SAFE level of humor/entertainment, never taking a chance on losing his 6¢ a word by stepping outside the SAFE GUIDELINES that make this magazine, ultimately, a boor. Sure, people read it because they're hungry for escapist sf. But there's no reason escapist sf has to be mediocre. Not so consistently as this. This is policy, and it's a policy that's affecting the whole field.

But the truth is, all across the publishing board, in science fiction books, magazines -- and in mainstream -- editors are opting for what's

safe, what's established. They want to take no chances because the economy is so shaky. It's that simple. Sell 'em pabulum because we've got 'em trained to but it.

I've just moved to New York City, and the signals I'm getting from editors are these: we want well-defined genre writing, nothing that mixes genres; we want it written according to two or three basic plot structures; we want you to write in the styles and structures that have proven lucrative.

Roy Torgeson, who's as experimental an editor as remains (and with Roy his only progressiveness is in sexual explicitness, kinkiness, cheap thrills), rejected a story by a friend of mine because the protagonist's problem was not revealed on the first page. It didn't have the usual hook. Instead, it had thought-provoking hints, background, characterization, and artful imagery bearing on the theme. Beautiful story. An entertaining story, for anyone who reads with both eyes open. She probably won't get it published in this field. It's structured slightly askew from the usual -- and I'm not saying it's bizarre in its syntax or radically experimental, it's simply not one of the obviously SAFE formulas. It discusses bondage and discipline openly and sympathetically. Horrors. That blows it for IASPM, F&SF, OMNI, Galileo, Universe, you-name-it.

Publishing houses are no longer relying on their editors for editorial decisions. Increasingly, the salesmen, the people who sell to the booksellers, make the final decision. And they could not care less about good writing. SF has leapt headfirst into unremitting commercialism. And, believe it or not, the field is even more conservative than the others, and hence is turning out more IASPM material. Bathing us in the grease of sameness.

Despite the tightening up across the board, the injunction against Quality Literature (that's their term, they usually shorten it to Qual Lit), I have more creative freedom outside the field of science fiction.

For that reason, and some personal reasons, and because I'm disgusted and disillusioned, I'm not going to write sf anymore. I'm writing -- and selling -- mainstream (the first of the mainstream books I sold is THE BRIGADE out from Avon late this year) suspense and mainstream fantasy. I've had it. I'm not going to write columns for semipro magazines anymore either. Too much teapet in a teapot, too many cutesy illos with pointy eared elves holding mechanical girls, illos having nothing to do with the articles. But I'm going to continue to read sf, and Thrust. We all have our perverse vices.

I'll send you a card from the breeding ground... I'll send you a bomb in the mail from the neon-walled pit where Nihilism mates with Vision and the offspring is Redemption.

I'll send you red lipstick on soiled tissue, the imprint of the queen's own lips.

I'll send you dust sifting from the crack in the subway's ceiling, the crack that widens for the day Manhattan collapses on itself.

I'll send you a snapshot of Utopia. I'll send it from the future to the past. By the time you get there the maggots will have eaten its face away, and Dystopia's eyeless sockets will glow like methane ignited over the city's sewers.

I'll send you music. Music to shake your walls.

FUROR SCRIBENDI: THE IMAGE OF THE BEAST

by
**MARK J.
McGARRY**



Some of us, way back when, had dreams of money. Others dreamt of our names in lights (or rich, dark print, as it were), and little else. My own dreams were a little more complex. (A trend that continues to this day, because I still think my attitudes towards writing -- both my own, and others' -- is too complex to satisfy Darwin's demands. But later.)

Naïve as it may seem, I first began to write with an eye for publication in order to finance grandiose plans I had for a literary magazine. From the start, it had been editing, not writing, that had the appeal. I fell prey to the mystique that surrounded John Campbell at the time, and that peaked soon after his death...about the time I became aware that I could string words together into cohesive, and perhaps publishable sentences.

Once I began writing in earnest, of course, its own appeals suckered me in, and I soon became aware that it was writing I truly loved, and that now the editing, when it came, would be the second career. It was easy to slip from one discipline to the other. And, when I began attending conventions, and corresponding with authors and editors, my old interest in editing and publishing gave me insights into what, as a professional writer, I could expect to experience, and enjoy.

Or so I thought.

As an unpublished writer, I still had some access to what went on between editors and other writers. I was like a dish-washer in the kitchen, sneaking glimpses of the party that was professionalism, going on in the Olympian ball-room right on the other side of that kitchen door. I wanted to be a good writer, yes, but I also wanted to taste what had been almost within

my grasp for so long. I wanted to talk to those figures, examine those contracts, negotiate for those clauses, attend the banquets, meet in conferences, plan strategies, and all the rest of it. So I watched, from the kitchen, and waited.

And then somebody handed me my going-out clothes and told me to get the hell out of the floor.

In October of 1978, Dave Hartwell -- then at Berkley -- signed for the second novel I had written, THE CHASER'S DOMAINS. I had written one about a year before, SPAN, and submitted it to him. At that time he'd not wanted it, but had suggestions for revision. A few weeks after the contracts for CHASER'S were signed, I sent him chapters and a synopsis for a radical revision of the earlier novel. He liked it, and by December I was into Berkley Books for a novel I had not yet written.

I was confident. Swaggering, even. I was barely twenty, and had two contracts, signed, sealed, and notarized. I had a few grand in my pocket, a new apartment on the sea, a new motorcycle...In short, a new life, or the fulfillment of one previously dreamt of. Though the revision of SPAN bore no more than a passing resemblance to the original -- was, in effect, a totally new work -- I knew it would not take me more than six months to finish it. I didn't feel like working on the book just then, I felt like enjoying the fruits of my as-yet-uneared gains. I asked for, and received, a delivery date of November 1979. I would start work on the book in June.

I frittered most of the first half of 1979

away. I had just moved; the disequilibrium at first energized me -- I finished up a novelet that had been languishing for months, and wrote a short story and a second novelet which I considered to be among the best I'd written. I sold a novelet to Analog, but that didn't take much effort aside from licking stamps, and then cashing the check when it came. I looked around for something else to do, and thought maybe I could do another novel, or maybe...

What I did was decide what to do for six weeks. It was a long time to be idle, considering that I was just beginning to see that in completed wordage, I hadn't done so much last year. I had sold two novels and three short stories, but I had only written a shade less than 30,000 words -- the equivalent of half a novel, or five short stories. Half of that had been done in the last two months of the year. By comparison, I had done slightly less than 100,000 words in 1977, and 140,000 in 1976.

This is about the time I began to wonder.

Seriously.

Was success ruining the kid? Would I be a two -- no, a 1 1/2 novel wonder? Would Don D'Ammassa, in 1967, rhetorically ask "What ever happened to him, this promising author of 1 1/2 interesting but sadly forgotten novels, way back when?"

It was a real fear. Logically, one would think I could have assumed that, having written, I would write; having sold, I would continue to sell. But it was not a logical fear.

I wasn't used to selling what I wrote. I'd been selling sporadically, and to good markets, for two or three years, but it was still new and foreign to me. I was going into projects with more concerns, not less. Before I'd worried about finishing a story, and selling it. Now, in addition to that, I was worried about to whom I would sell it, for what, and if the check would come before the collision insurance payment was due; I was worried about reversion of rights, royalty break-points, what the reviewers would think, what the jacket copy would say. I had always been overly concerned with the process of writing: where I got my ideas, my style, my subject matter and themes. With everything put together I was turning into a literary brontosaurus, with so many thoughts and worries that I was barely able to wallow in my coud without consulting subsidiary brains.

That turned around in February 1979 when I met John Silbersack, my new editor at Berkley. In 1978 I'd mumbled something to my agents about maybe working on short stories in '79 -- and SPAN, of course! -- and the word had gone from them to Silbersack, who, at Boskone, took me aside. It was a new experience for me, very much in keeping with what the true writer's life should be; it was the first time I'd been taken aside.

"You really should work on a new novel for us," he told me.

"I'm still working on my old one!" I didn't say that. For one, I was not working on my old one, I was doing anything but; secondly, when one has been taken aside, there are forces to be adhered to. I nodded sagely. Not because I was sage and thoughtful, but because I was trying to grasp the fact that an editor was asking me to write something for him. It was an upheaval of the tradition epitomized by those familiar still blue rejection slips from Galaxy.

He told me how salesmen for the publishers like to know there are more books in the pipe-

line when they try to hawk an author's first novel to bookstores and distributors. Nobody, it seems, wants a novel. They want strings of successes. Berkley wanted to be sure I was a string.

"I've got an idea for a novel," I said. I had lots of ideas for novels. "Still, I can't yet support myself from my writings, John. I also work full-time, and there just isn't the time to start anything new." I needed bread.

"I hope I could expect to realize a larger advance for a new novel."

"I think we could count on that."

Wow, he not only wanted a book, he'd pay me for it! This was an experience.

I was galvanized. It didn't show right away. I drew up work schedules, sharpened pencils, budgeted the money for the new -- no, the two new novels I would send Berkley.

By March I'd told my agents that I would have the proposal for a new book in their hands by the first of April...and a proposal for another novel to them by the Nebula Awards Banquet, three weeks later. It seemed that every day I was getting more, oh, professional. Here I was, making delivery dates for proposals now. I even hired a typist to help me with the drafts of the books. Which was a good thing, because one proposal ran to 35,000 words. But it was for a quarter-million word novel that I wanted fifteen or twenty grand for, so it didn't seem inappropriate.

I saw Silbersack again at the Banquet, in New York City, and this time I took him aside, and told him that my agents would send along the proposals presently. I illuminated their niftiest points for him.

His reaction was such that I started to pat my pockets for a pen. I thought he was going to give me one of those six-figure contracts I'd been hearing so much about right then and there. But then he calmed down and said he'd get me an answer in a few weeks. The way I saw it, it was not a question of his accepting the books or not, but how much bread he could squeeze out of the contracts department.

What I didn't know at the time was that all editors act excited when writers tell them about new work. Maybe sometimes they even are excited. Writers have to be kept happy when a new work is in the balance. Once the contract is signed, of course, the legal department keeps that latest parcel in the string of successes coming.

Berkley saw me as one of their writers. I saw myself as one of their writers. It was neat, like being drafted out of high school to play with the Red Sox or something. Or so I thought.

I don't really remember what I did in May and the first part of June. It must have been more puttering. Puttering days run into another, as well they should.

Six weeks had passed. Editors have a curiously telescoped time sense. A few weeks means eventually. As soon as we can get to it, of course, means never, but everyone knows that by now.

At intervals, I would get vaguely apologetic notes from my agents. John was at a sales conference on the West Coast and could not be reached, but he was still interested in the books. John was on his way to ABA when they talked to him, but he wanted one or both of the books and was going to call the contracts department real soon to see what he could offer. John was in the shower and nobody at that point knew what the hell was going on.

By the last week of June I broke what had seemed like a patient silence, but which had actually been enraged fuming, and asked my agents just what, if anything, was happening. I knew the wheels at Berkley ground exceedingly fine, but just how long did it take to put a call through the switchboard to another department in the same building?

I was tense. I admit it. A few things had happened to put me on edge, above and beyond just what being on Berkley's team really meant.

I'd officially started work on SPAN, and immediately found that while a synopsis is sufficient to sell a novel, it isn't detailed enough to write one. I avoided the (I now realize) uncharted reaches of the last 80% of the novel by rewriting the first part, which had been a part of the original proposal. I wanted to cut and smooth the opening. I took a week off from work to do it, without pay, and turned 70 pages to 94 which I was not pleased with.

I had figured I could rewrite that first section during the first two or three days of my week, and then spend the next four days getting a running jump into the rest of the book. Once I got my momentum up, I'd bust right through a first draft, clean it up, and send it out well before that looming deadline, no sweat.

Friday I finished the 94-page slop, with only the weekend ahead of me. Perhaps, just perhaps, time enough.

At 4:30 am on Saturday morning, the buzzer of the apartment security system intercom woke me. "Lo?" I mumbled.

The intercom said it was Eric, come all the way from Albany to drop in. And another good friend, Robert, was with him.

Only Eric would travel nearly two hundred miles to drop in unannounced, on the spur of the moment, just because he wanted to see me. Or maybe Robert would too, because he was the one that had done the driving and paid for the gas. At any rate, it was a gesture of friendship and brotherhood that should have melted my heart.

"I'm going to kill you," I said, and then let them in.

They stayed until Sunday afternoon. Sunday evening I went to a barbecue. I was available. I was a free-lancer. It wasn't as if I were chained to the typewriter or anything. I could set my own hours. If writers had an induction center, those would be the slogans on the posters outside.

At 2:30 Monday morning, the phone rang. "Lo?" I mumbled. I was too fuzzy to feel any *deja vu*.

"Mister McGarry, this is the Police Department. When was the last time you saw your motorcycle?"

About a half-hour before two kids pushed it away under cover of darkness, as it developed. When I went down to claim it, it also developed that I was the one who had to push it home. The pair -- who, under the best of circumstances, would have been hard-pressed to plug in a toaster -- had tried to hot-wire the bike. The electrical system looked like the torn newspaper they put in pet shop windows for puppies to shit on.

Monday afternoon I was told my work at my full-time job was unsatisfactory. I interpreted that as an intimation that I was about to get very hungry.

Somewhere in there I'd ordered a new IBM electronic typewriter. Not one of those Selectric Bissels but a computerized jobbie. I was into Itty-Bitty for the balance of the payments, and into my bank for the downpayment.

I also had not written anything in the better

part of a week, which, on the schedule that had looked so good in November 1978, about a thousand years ago, was disastrous.

I called my agents. Where was Silbersack? For that matter, where were they?

Silbersack was rejecting -- rejecting, mind you, as if I were not a pro or something! -- the shorter novel. Or, maybe he wasn't rejecting it, but he didn't want it the way it was. He didn't want the other one the way it was, either, but he thought that was at least salvageable.

For Berkley.

With someone coming out of left field, both books would have been turned down out of hand. But Berkley wanted me, so they had spent a month or more waffling, for the most part trying to figure out how I could give them what they wanted. Failing that, they could word the rejections in such a way, presumably, so I would not take offense and take a walk.

"Pull the shorter book," I said. "Send it to someone who can read it, accept it, and draw up contracts all in the same year!" Things were desperate. It sounded it.

Editors may have no sense of time, but they have a hell of a sense of timing.

"We'll get back to you by the end of the week and let you know what's happening with the longer books," said my agents.

"Right." I hung up. It occurred to me the toll for the call had been billed to me. Better start watching that, I thought.

Then I wondered if my agents spoke New York editorese, and then what "end of the week" translated to.

Saturday rolled around. The phone had been silent. Naturally.

*

But I still had my sales, and I still had my deadline, and my proposals. I still had my agents, and they were still getting back to me. Maybe, when I got my strength back and got my head together, I'd go back to New York and get taken aside again. I'd go to a party and another new editor would be there. I'd clink a fork against his goblet for everyone's attention, and then climb (slightly drunkenly) up on the table. "Folks, this is Mark J. McGarry. We've just given him one of our six-figure contracts. He's Made It." And there would be a polite round of applause, and later a session with some women provided by my new publisher. That was the way it was supposed to go. Or at least something along those lines.

When I Made It, there would be a humming of orchestrated muzak, and rose petals would fall at my feet and birds alight on my dinner-jacketed shoulders. Publishers would throw money at me, and awed young writers would ask me how I'd done it.

Write? Surely one would not be expected to work, after one has made it. Well, maybe three months a year, in the Caribbean, or London, or in Spain.

...But maybe, instead, I'd finish up SPAN. Maybe I'd work on new stories, and new novels. Maybe I'd start telling friends I had too much work to do, but then maybe I'd be a little more civil when I was able to see them. Maybe I'd start getting in touch with what I wanted now that I knew the way things were, and not how they'd look from that metaphorical kitchen so very long ago. Maybe I'd grow a little.

And maybe, just maybe, I would begin again to write, and to stop being a writer.

Jessica Amanda Salmonson

MOSCON FAN GUEST OF HONOR SPEECH

MOSCOW, IDAHO
September, 1979

I want to talk a little about the hazy definitions which distinguish the science fiction fan from the science fiction professional, and what it means to make the transition from fan to professional.

From the ranks of fandom we've acquired some of the finest fantasy and sf writers today: Harlan Ellison, Ray Bradbury, Robert Silverberg, Marion Zimmer Bradley and so many others. Some of the leading sf editors, such as Terry Carr, once edited nothing more phenomenal than a fanzine. The very founders of science fiction as a well-defined genre -- Asimov to Wolfheim -- were also among the founders of the equally well-defined and diverse society we today call fandom.

If there are fans here at MosCon who dream of entering the ranks of professional writers, you've got some very fine role models to work from.

Some of the people who are today "mere" fans will undoubtedly become well known authors or editors or publishers or artists or agents one-of these-days. Others will remain dreamers and not doers, and they may even lose their dreams, some of them. The majority, perhaps, have no aspiration beyond collecting, reading, sharing and loving fantasy and science fiction. The best among this latter group will embrace the friends they meet through fandom who are destined to write, and say, I knew her, or I knew him -- I knew them all -- when they haunted the sf corner of every bookstore, and never knew that someday they'd find their own books there. The people who aspire only to loving the genre will delight in seeing the successes of those who write it. But among the group with the desire to write, but not enough talent or stamina to make it, they will remain those among us who grow to professional status.

The concept of the "fannish feud" is one of the most horrifying and tiresome aspects of an otherwise positive society, because sometimes,

people who lose their dreams are very sad and angry.

In the past year, I've had the fortune of selling a book anthology to a major paperback house; selling short stories to anthologies for two other large publishers; finishing a novel which is at this moment being negotiated by an agent...and at the same time, I've made fanzines, haunted bookstores, and been honored for my contributions to fandom by a science fiction convention. I place myself presently in the hazy boarderland where fans are becoming pros, yet remaining a fan as well. I'd like to share with you a few of the feelings and experiences that go hand in hand with such a surprising transition.

The hardest thing is coping with those fans whose dreams are crushed because they lack ability or commitment. In a competitive marketplace, the majority of those who think about writing will fail as writers, even if they make the first effort. Most never even get beyond the thinking stage, so of course they never had a chance. This creates hostilities between those who make it, and those who do not.

Phillip K. Dick, in a recent issue of UNEARTH magazine, said that what you do when you well your first story is call up your best friend and say, "I sold a story!" At which point your friend hangs up on you and you wonder, "What happened?"

It's sad to think that at a time when fannish friends should be joining you in celebration, they ostracise you because you succeeded where they either failed, or have not yet succeeded or tried.

About the middle of 1978, a friend of mine came running over to tell me, "Hey, I sold a collection of essays to a small press!" And I said, "That's great! I just sold an anthology to DAW Books!" I honestly hadn't intended to deflate him, but his shoulders sagged and his eyes squinched up and he was mad for a week. He got over it.

Another time, when I was almost finished with my first novel, I said to a different friend, "Twenty more pages and I've got a novel ready to sell." He replied with unexpected cuttness: "Congratulations. I have 200 pages to go on mine," and walked away. It hurt me a lot.

But the anger he showed me was anger at himself, for failing to pursue a dream.

Genuine friends get over their envy soon enough, and jealousy turns into joy. But unfortunately, fandom is made up largely of acquaintances, not genuine friends, and therefore longstanding hostilities evolve between some fans and others. Even among professional writers, some of the most loudly aired and publicized disagreements sometimes have their root in past fannish days, when each party accumulated huge piles of sour grapes and have thrown them at each other ever since.

Now, by contrast, do professionals behave when seeing a fan "joining the ranks" so to speak? To be sure, there are a few "old guard" writers who resent this invasion very much. An established author who, after 30 years, is finally guaranteed a \$5000 advance on every new book, is not going to be happy that writers like Joan Vinge and Vonda N. McIntyre are getting \$60,000. The fact that many of the new writers -- C. J. Cherryh, Tanith Lee,

etc. -- are women doesn't sit well with many of the old timers who remember "the good old days" of the pulps when the few women involved at least had the good sense not to be overtly female. Lee Hoffman, Leigh Brackett, C.L. Moore...is it really coincidental that the only women's names were uniformly androgynous?

In any case, the influx of women and feminism has certainly met with a great amount of flack and hostility from a professional as well as fan science fiction community, which historically has been even more male-dominated than it is today.

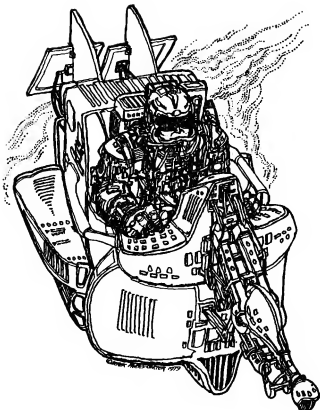
But these negative aspects seem to me to be the loud minority response. From other writers already settled in the community, the greatest response to a newcomer is one of joy and welcome. This can create or perpetuate the dichotomy which often exists between professionals and fans, when a new writer discovers herself on the lot of authors. It is tempting in this circumstance to subscribe to Harlan Ellison's point about fans being bad medicine. But on closer examination, there is something very dubious about the sudden welcome to the professional fold.

When I sold Amazons! to DAW, authors who had known me for years but had not had much time for me, suddenly started calling me on the phone to hear about the weather in Seattle, to cry on my shoulder about a scene in a story that wouldn't work, or a love affair gone awry. It feels good that they want my support and offer me theirs. But sometimes I can't help but wonder where these people were when I was lonely and struggling. I was still here. I was reaching out. I was still me.

I can think of a few who were supportive in my unhappier times. For example, Elinor and F. M. Busby (who are here today) were two of my first friends in fandom. But the majority of authors only acknowledged my humanity and presence when they saw my name in Publishers Weekly. I don't like that.

In all, it's a disorienting experience, to find oneself at a pivotal point in one's life. But there's an easy way to not be thrown by it. What I found out very soon is that writing is the most important thing, not what people say or do, be it positive or negative. In fact, since writing is a solitary business, writers have got to be able to spend quite a bit of time with themselves; they've got to learn to like themselves. In effect, no one is more important to a writer than the writer's plots and characters and output. Fans, by contrast, spend a lot of their time with each other, rather than chained to a typewriter (or, if chained to a typewriter, using it for "LoCs" and "fansac" rather than for anything professional). Writers are too selfish to need that much outside validation, too stubborn to settle for less. Nothing is more important than writing, and this remains true even in the face of adversity; even if it means losing friends, losing a marriage, or losing a lover. It's crazy, but you've got to be crazy to be a writer; you've got to be consumed by it.

If some of you want to be writers, you'll have to become consumed by it. There is no room for other obsessions. You can't be obsessed with Fandom As A Way Of Life and also be a writer. Your core identity has got to be "Writer!" with every-



thing else radiating out from that. Writing is the most holy thing any human being can do with a life! Anyone who does it can rarely avoid an egotistical appearance. Perhaps it's little wonder, then, that fans who become writers become targets of abuse. The sheer audacity of being a writer is enough to make a more rational person seethe. The unexcelled boldness of doing a good job of it will make the cowards gather together in angry crowds to tear you from your perch, or from your ivory tower.

Or...they'll gather together to idolize you. It's really the same phenomenon.

I will probably always be a fan; I'm not certain. It depends on the definition. I'll certainly always count a number of fans among my friends and acquaintances. But it always comes back to the writing, and if some of you feel that way too, it could be that you're on the right course.

If you dream of being a writer, pursue that dream with a vengeance. If the dream ends in disillusion, I don't know what to tell you. But if you never try, somewhere inside you'll always hate yourself, and you won't be a good friend to others. I do believe that if your dreams are things you pursue rather than simply talk about, you're halfway there.

To those of you who only want to read the stuff, look around you and try to anticipate who will be writing for your tastes tomorrow. If they're properly obsessed, they won't need any encouragement, but give them some anyway. Everyone can use a little love. I feel that you've all encouraged me a little bit by having me here for this weekend of appreciating science fiction and fandom. I'm really pleased, and I thank you a lot.

PAPER WARRIORS

SF & FANTASY GAMING

PART III: ROLE PLAYING GAMES

David Nalle



Dyfnin felt his way through the passages to the heart of the mountain. He dared not light a torch, for fear of alerting the fell inhabitants of the caverns. His steps were guided by the pale phosphorescence of the fungus which coated the walls.

Ahead, a bright red glow spilled around a bend. He let his eyes adjust and crept up to peer around the corner. In a cavern with its roof hidden in mist lay the wyrm. He was curled around himself in sleep, a machine of living metallic doom. His hand-broad eyes were closed, and two trails of steam rose from his nostrils to the roof. His scales glowed with the heat of the fires from which he was formed.

Dyfnin knew that his true dangers lay beyond the dragon in the dark passage entrance which it guarded. The dragon was just a trial set by the ruler of these caverns, the Wizard Manshadach.

Dyfnin advances slowly to the head of the beast, lifting his sword, Llaesgymn, above his head in both hands. With all of his strength, he plunged it down into the monster's eye and brain. The dragon reared up, jerking the sword from his hands. Its other eye opened in shock, and steam burst forth from its mouth.

It convulsed, and one of its great, leather wings caught Dyfnin, throwing him across the cavern against a wall. Flame gouted from its mouth and faded. The dragon's eye dimmed as it collapsed and lay still.

Dyfnin rose slowly, scalded and bruised. He walked gingerly over to the huge head and took back his sword. Bare blade in hand, he approached the entrance to the chambers of the Wizard.

In the dimly lit hall beyond the dragon's lair, Manshadach bent over a deep pool, his face contorted in a dread concentration. His dark robe flapped in a noxious wind, and the light from a small brazier glinted off of the restless waters and his bald pate.

Dyfnin entered just as the mage was finishing his incantation. He leapt across the pool, bowling Manshadach over. The wizard's skull hit the cave floor with a crunch, and he lay still. Wary of the dangers which might remain, Dyfnin went swiftly to a chest at the back of the room to claim his booty.

With a sucking sound, a tentacle as wide as a man rose from the depths of the pool. It poised behind Dyfnin's back. Another joined it, and another. Dyfnin turned in horror, but too late. They wrapped around him, crushing his struggles. In the murky waters below, the Kraken, Manshadach's last calling, opened its beak in anticipation.

Fantasy Role Playing is a way to become part of a Heroic Fantasy story by controlling the actions of one of the characters. This is usually done with players assuming the roles of characters they have designed. They then test their skill in a scenario designed by a Game Master (GM). He provides the background and situation, while the players create the major characters and initiate most of the action. This is as close as you can come to actually living in a world where magic works and heroism is its own reward.

Rule systems for Fantasy and SF Role Playing Games were developed as a means of entering various types of fantastic worlds. These mechanics handle the technical and random factors of a character's actions and their results. Randomness is provided by rolling 4, 6, 8, 10, or 12 sided dice. Factors of natural law and social structure are provided by the GM and the rules he chooses to use.

There are a large number of SF and Fantasy Role Playing systems, but they all have several similar concepts behind them. Essential to all is the presence of a GM, also called the Referee, or Dungeon Master, who moderates play. Equally important are the players, who run the characters, not against the world or the GM, but in it and as a part of it. Within this general common framework more specific similarities exist.

A player usually creates a character by rolling several characteristics to represent its abilities. These often include Strength, Dexterity, Agility, Intelligence, Endurance, Charisma, and Psionic Ability. These characteristics outline what the character can do, and what he can't. The player will then pick a profession, or skill selection appropriate to the character's abilities. Some popular professions are Warriors, Thieves, Magicians, and Priests. Many other classes

also exist. Each class has its own area of knowledge and skill.

The GM designs a world, or purchases one from a publisher. He details the societies and inhabitants of his world, and he controls all that they do. Within this framework, he designs his scenarios, be they quests, pilgrimages, or explorations of unknown realms. These scenarios are called Dungeons, or Adventures. They can take place anywhere in the world, but the most popular places are underground cave complexes, abandoned ruins, and uncharted wilderness.

From here, interaction between player and GM, and the character and his world, determines the course of the story. The results can be moving, tragic, and sometimes very funny. As the players do more in the world, it grows, and the flavor of the campaign increases, with certain characters becoming legendary for villainy or heroism. Great adventures are remembered and harked back to, and long term relationships often develop between characters and the powerful GM run characters in the world. In time, characters find a place in their society, and eventually adventures generate themselves from past deeds of the characters, and the on going strife in the society.

All of this involves a great deal of work for the GM, even if he purchases scenarios and a world from one of the game companies. The players are also called on to put a lot of work into developing interesting and consistent personalities for their characters, so that each one is different, and none are just clones of the player.

All of these generalities also apply in SF Role Playing Games, though the background is usually a post-armageddon world or a whole galaxy, rather than a fantasy world, and the characters fight with blasters and space ships instead of swords and spells. As in fiction, there is considerable overlap here between sf and fantasy, and many games exist which exist in the unclear area between the two.

There are six major Fantasy Role Playing Games on the market, each with associated paraphernalia. About four of games could be called major, though they are of widely varying quality and content. New rule systems come out about once a year in each field, and new scenarios are published each month by at least two of the major companies. In addition, there are some small companies which produce very good aids and rules, but have not yet hit the boom which is carrying the rest of the market. I will do my best to give brief explanations of the top systems and their attendant game aids.

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS (Tactical Studies Rules): This is the rewritten version of the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, which was the first professional Role Playing Game. It was designed by David Arneson, with some help from Gary Gygax, who has taken it over and developed it into what it is now. It has spawned a huge number of aids and expansions, and is largely responsible for the success of Role Playing Games and the phenomenal growth of TSR. It is in 3 large, hardcover books which cost \$35.00 together. There is also a beginners version, which is largely useless, and sells for somewhat less.

The rules have suffered from the intractability of their designer, who did not take into account many of the new trends in the field when he wrote them. This resulted in the system being improved immeasurably, but remaining essentially a complex development of a primitive system. The game is very playable, especially for young players more interested in gaming than in Fantasy. It is very well detailed and developed; however, it has acquired a rigidity of structure from this which took away the charming generalness of the original rules, and tends to stifle innovation. The magic system is complex, and tries for realism, but because of a ridiculous obsession with the type of magic in Jack Vance's *Dying Earth* stories, they are saddled with some concepts which are annoying and unrealistic, such as Magic-Users forgetting spells after casting them, and the like. This rigidity shows up elsewhere in the rules, but can for the most part be glossed over.

The good points of the rules are that they spell everything out well for a beginner, and are very playable. They also provide very good monster and profession descriptions. This is all because the production and design was done on an unparalleled level of professionalism and care.

AD&D is mechanically weak, but mechanics are not necessarily important. It can be used as a base for developing a personal variant, just old D&D was, but now that requires more work and expense.

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Scenarios and background material for AD&D are produced by both TSR and The Judges Guild. The production quality of the TSR material is superior to that of TJG, but the content quality is about equal. The quality of content in scenarios from both companies varies wildly. Both have produced outstanding works. Among the best are "Of Skulls and Scrapfaggot Green" (TJG), "The Dark Tower" (TJG), "Tomb of Horrors" (TSR), and "Steading of the Hill Giant Chief" (TSR). There are also a large number of scenarios which show little thought, and much die rolling. In general bad scenarios outnumber good ones by 2 or 3 to one. Even a novice GM with a bit of imagination can create a good adventure for free, saving himself at least \$5.00.

Judges Guild has also produced a game aid called "The City State of the Invincible Overlord", which is a series of modules detailing an entire world. They are not bad background material, but they include a huge amount of waste space, and in the end, the encounters and situations provided are just boring. A new version, "The City State of the World Emperor" has just come on the market, and may be better.

TUNNELS & TROLLS (Flying Buffalo Inc.): This game was the second professional production. It has been widely abused as a "rip-off" of D&D, but it really isn't. It has also suffered from poor marketing and low-quality production in the past. The new 5th edition has been cleaned up, and is on the highest level of quality, with beautiful graphics and art. It looks better than any other system on the market. T&T was designed by Ken St. Andre.

The good points of T&T are its simplicity, and emphasis on developing the character. It is a good game for introducing beginners with, because of its lack of restriction. It is in many ways like the original D&D rules. Though the mechanics are different, it retains the same open-ended approach.

It is fortunate that T&T emphasizes more than just the game system, because mechanics are its weakest point. The magic system works well, but the combat system is too simple, and tends to become dull, because it is over abstracted. This weakness is especially noticable in mass combat, which does not take enough account of the characters' choices and actions. It also leads to it being overly easy for a character to die. This sort of hurts the original strength of the system, which is in the development of those characters.

There are a number of very good T&T solitaire scenarios, which are set up so that they can be played without a GM. They are very well worked out, with a lot of detail. Most of them tend to be too short, and too lethal, but this is very hard to avoid with solitaire play. Some of the best of these are "Labyrinth", "Deathtrap Equalizer", and "Beyond the Silvered Pane". FBI is also working on adventures for GMs to run.

RUNEQUEST (The Chaosium): This is a very interesting system, quite far removed from either D&D or T&T. It is probably the most completely independently developed rule system on the market, and the one which borrows the least from D&D. It is also the only major system which is set in a specific Fantasy world,

that of Glorantha, which is used in many games from Chaosium. The rules are clear and well thought out. It presents a good bit of material and costs only \$10.00 and was designed by Steve Perrin.

Unfortunately, RQ is very complex, and mostly in places where complexity is not needed. This results in areas where complexity would be far more appropriate being glossed over. Because of its setting in Glorantha, the rules are flavored by that world, and if you happen not to like Glorantha, you won't like the rules. It is basically a dull and unsophisticated world -- socially and culturally.

On the other hand, if your willing to deal with the complexity, its combat system is more realistic than AD&D or T&T, and it treats learning and skills in an original and much more believable way than any other major system. RQ is not really for beginners, but experienced players might find parts of it very useful.

There are RQ supplements, and also some scenarios. From what I've seen the best supplement is "Cults of Prax", which tries to flesh out the background of the game and expand on the weak cult based magic/faith system. Scenarios and supplements are done by Chaosium and Judges Guild.

THE ARDUIN GRIMOIRE: This is not really an independent rule system, but rather a very successful expansion of D&D. It is in three \$10.00 books written by Dave Hargrave. It gives new monsters, professions, and magic items, and huge numbers of tables to fill in those places where D&D is weak or inconsistent.

Its strengths and weaknesses are hard to assess, but its main drawback is that everything is a bit over-powered. Its strength is in ideas for world background and high-power adventures. It shows how it is possible to run a D&D campaign with outrageous characters and in a chaotic world. Combined with D&D, a very good mixture system could be worked out by an experienced GM.

There are a number of Arduin adventures. They have a lot of good ideas, and are exciting. It is very likely, however, that 10% or fewer of the characters who enter them will come back alive.

CHIVALRY & SORCERY (Fantasy Games Unlimited): This game is set in a chivalric context and was designed by Ed Simbalist and Wilf Backhaus. It and AD&D are probably the two most generally acceptable game systems. The original rules sell for \$10.00, and are well worth the price.

The only weak area of the system is in magic, which is not detailed enough and tends to be mechanical. There are also little flaws elsewhere in the rules, but it works smoothly. The jousting system is especially good, as is combat in general. It benefits from not being too complex and explaining everything fully. It is not necessarily for beginners, but it could be taken up by a novice and be played after a few readings.

The real greatness of C&S is in its supplements. There are quite a number now, including "Arden" which sets a world for play. The best supplements are "Swords and Sorcerers", which gives more cultural background, "The Chivalry and Sorcery Sourcebook", which gives great medieval detail, and "Bireme and Galley", the best rules for ship design, trade, and sea com-

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bat on the market. The rules, and these supplements, while not the greatest game system are eventually essential for the serious GM, because they are the best reference works available on medieval and fantasy society. They are amazingly well researched, and very complete.

THE FANTASY TRIP (Metagaming): This system is the most recent addition to the field. It is based on the Microgames "Melee," and "Wizard," and it reflects this in its nature. It is very basic and extremely limited. All of the systems are well worked out, but the mechanics are so important that the game suffers a terminal loss of interest and excitement. Non-board-gamers will not like TFT at all. It is sort of like one of those little mechanical boxing games, with no room for character development.

TRAVELLER (Game Design Workshop): This is the outerspace Role Playing Game. It comes in 3 booklets which sell for \$10.00 together. It includes rules for character design, world design, and building space ships.

The strengths of the game are its detail, simplicity of play, and character development. The combat system is very easy to use, and fairly realistic. The detail is amazing, especially in the descriptions of technological weapons. The character generation system is a joy, because of the complete background which it creates for the character. Rolling a character is often more fun than playing the game.

The basic problem with TRAVELLER is that it is not much fun to play. There is too little room for variation, because of the unavoidable imprisonment of the characters in space ships. Ship to ship combat is largely dependent on the quality of the ships and little else. Characters can do little to affect such a battle. This means that a major portion of the game is dull, and it only really shines when the characters are on a planet in a raid, or between trips. All of this makes it very hard to GM a TRAVELLER adventure without boring the players.

TRAVELLER scenarios and supplements strive to solve this problem and some of them do. The scenarios, especially "The Kuinir," and "Snapshot" are very good. Among the supplements quality is less high. The best is "Mercenary," which expands the rules well, but two, "Animal Encounters" and "1001 Characters," are useless explorations of areas in the rules which badly needed well thought out expansions.

EMPIRE OF THE PETAL THRONE (TSR): This is a wonderfully detailed game in the borderland between sf and fantasy. It is set on the world of Tekumel, which is an alien planet, with technology and magic, and mixtures of the two present.

The mechanics are weak imitations of D&D, but they are made up for by the care taken in developing the background by its designer, W.A.R. Barker. The real problem with EPT is that it is so involved and so intricate on social and cultural levels that it takes a

really dedicated GM to run it well. It also costs \$30.00 for the rules.

There are some interesting supplements. Most notable among these is "The Legions of the Petal Throne."

Other major sf games which are also worth looking into are METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA (TSR), set in the post armageddon future, and GAMMA WORLD (TSR), a similar effort. SPACE QUEST from TYR Games is a good interstellar game which is cheaper and easier to play than TRAVELLER, but lacks its depth.

In addition, there are numerous small press and less well known game systems in both sf and fantasy. Among these are HIGH FANTASY, ADVENTURES IN FANTASY, THE YSGARTH RULES, and BIFROST. They cater to different tastes in rule systems, with varying degrees of complexity. There are also many supplements which add to rule systems which already exist, and several scenarios designed for universal use with any system.

Magazines are coming to play an increasingly important role in the field. There are currently six professional magazines, and an equal number of top-flight fanzines. Magazines present articles on different systems, additions to rules, and sometimes scenarios. Magazine scenarios are often better than the longer ones which are published on their own.

The main magazines are: THE DRAGON, which concerns itself mainly with AD&D; SORCERER'S APPRENTICE, a very good T&T magazine with interesting general articles and very good fiction; DIFFERENT WORLDS, a RQ related magazine, which tries to deal with other games as well; WHITE DWARF, a British D&D connected magazine with some very good articles on other systems as well; THE SPACEGAMER from Metagaming, which treats a hodgepodge of games; THE JOURNAL OF THE TRAVELLER'S AID SOCIETY, which deals, of course, with TRAVELLER. ALARUMS & EXCURSIONS AND THE WILD HUNT are the top two Amateur Press Associations (APAs). The best fanzines are THE APPRENTICE, ABYSS QUARTERLY, WYRM'S FOOTNOTES, and THE QUICK QUINCY GAZETTE.

The future of Fantasy Role Playing games looks very bright. Even in our current economic slump, the field is booming, and TSR has been adding a 0 to its profits each year since they released D&D. Computerized games are growing, though they are far less interesting or realistic than human-GMed games. New games are released frequently, and new companies enter the market at an amazing rate.

TSR claims that there are some 500,000 D&D players in the world, and it is reasonable to suspect that the number is higher when other games are included. This number has been rising each year, and it would not be surprising to see it pass the million mark by the end of the decade.

Role Playing Games are the best escape we have discovered, and for that section of the population which has not become addicted to TV, they should become an increasingly attractive refuge in those times when contact with the mundane world is not necessary. As our world continues to become less exciting and less mysterious, and as conditions decline, even here in the United States, games will become more and more popular as an inexpensive alternative to psychotherapy or madness.

You are a comics fan or science fiction fan.

You're whole life you have grown up reading about heroes, about fighting, about violence, crime. These have been exercises in a fantasy world that is not ours. However, very soon your attitudes about heroism, war, and the military will become crucial.

As you know, the Congress has re-instituted the REGISTRATION FOR THE DRAFT for those aged 19 and 20 years. Signing up at local post offices will go on this summer. Provisions are being made for other age groups to sign up, if necessary. The machinery for the actual draft has been set in motion. When you register for the draft this month, you could get a notice a week later to report for basic training.

A registration for the Draft means only one thing. That a Draft, and therefore a war will follow. Registration is not a joke, a political gimmick, or anything like signing up for jury duty. It is a process by which your government-- against your will and rights-- asks you to kill other human beings in what they will inevitably call a "necessary defense" against American security.

President Carter feels our "interests" in the Persian Gulf have been threatened. Threatened by the same people, fascists and political terrorists, unreasonable people (like the crazy Iranians who protested against the honest Shah we so carefully arranged to sit in power over there) -- who are not only attacking us through our dependence on oil, but ideologically.

If you know anything about history, you have seen how governments have always rationalized a war to their people to enlist them in military mandatory service. You have seen that later, the war is never justified. The hypocrisy and manipulation become all too apparent. If you read the newspapers, you have seen how certain politicians, military leaders, and our current president have manipulated public opinion over the Iranian crises, the invasion of Afghanistan, and the Olympic withdrawal to stir up a new wave of nationalism and patriotism in America. One of the results of this is the justification of military action.

But we can do something. We have to do it now, though. We can't wait. Evading the draft later on won't be as easy as with Vietnam. The exemptions for service have been all but eliminated, and discussion of a Visa freeze has been suggested as a way to detect those of us who want to take off to Canada, Switzerland, or Sweden.

What do you believe? We believe that it is an inalienable human right to choose whether or not to fight in a war, and cause injury and death to otherwise innocent people. We believe that the registration and draft is unlawful, inhumane, and unjust. We are exercising our rights as Americans to prevent it's implementation.

We have formed an organization called F.A.R. (which stands for Fans Against Registration). Its purpose is to bring together people in fandom who oppose the draft, and to initiate discussion of the issue in fanzines everywhere. Our ability to write letters will come in handy for the first phase of this action against the draft.

Over the next few days, a national protest will occur. Groups throughout the country are notifying their members to write out "Anti-Draft Cards." No matter how old you are, you can send a card. Get a pre-stamped post card from the p.o. (10¢) and write the statement "I am registering AGAINST the draft" on the back and send it to "C.A.R.D., 245 Second Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002" These post cards will be collected and delivered to Jimmy Carter at the White House. The more people you can get to write cards, the better.

The second step of the action is up to you. It consists of getting the word out to your friends in fandom and talking about this problem. Write letters to editors of fanzines, encourage your friends to talk about the draft at conventions and club meetings, in apas.

Comic book fans and science fiction fans have always talked about heroism and violence and war when they were talking about Superman, Batman, and the X-Men. Now it's time to talk about it in a very different way.

If you would like information about the legal status of registrants, and the names of local and national organizations and protest actions, write to Bill-Dale Marcinko or Chip Krug of AFTA MAGAZINE. Bill-Dale is at 47 Crater Ave, Wharton, NJ 07885, and Chip is at 6 Pittman Lane, Sicklerville, NJ 08081. DON'T WAIT!

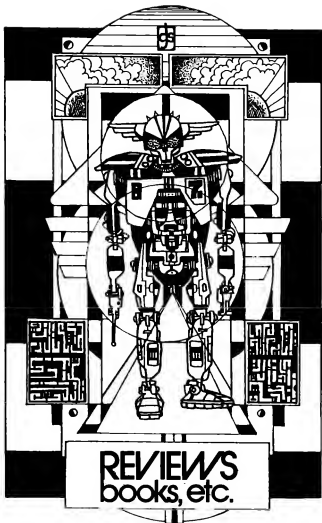
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some issues, and the conclusion will leave you turning over some of them in your mind. The novel is an entertainment, certainly, and a fine one, but it's a more-than-entertainment too, just as Graham Greene's spy novels transcend that minor genre.

The book is littered with many Esteban Maroto illustrations that reduce the characters to comicbook posturing. Zelazny's charming heroine, for example, is transformed into a voluptuous battle wench in fur boots. Too bad. Zelazny's writing deserved better.

Buy the book anyway.

--Joe Sanders



DRAGON'S EGG by Dr. Robert L. Forward (Del Rey, 1980, \$9.95)

Dr. Forward is one of the world's foremost researchers into the nature of gravity. He is a pioneer in the strange new discipline of gravitational astronomy. His accomplishments are legion, and it would be asking too much for him to write professional quality fiction as well. But the theorizing in *Dragon's Egg* is spectacular enough that, as with James Hogan, it is necessary to suspend one's critical faculties to enjoy the book.

Dragon's Egg is the story of the Cheela, a race of amoeboid beings who have evolved on the surface of a neutron star, a body so dense that its surface gravity is 67 million times that of Earth.

The beginning of the book, set on Earth among humans, is a bit difficult to take. The prose is clumsy and naive:

"Little green men begin to sound more and more plausible." Donald said as he lay on the grass next to Jacqueline. He had taken her to a show and had been pleased that she had taken the trouble to put on her "women's things." Behind her prettied-up face, the intelligence that was Jacqueline peered out and frowned disapprovingly."

These people talk and act like emotionless children. Fortunately, the neutron star is soon discovered, the action moves off the planet, and the half-tone personalities recede into the background.

The Cheela live a million or so times faster than people. So the structure of the novel consists of one day in the lives of a group of human researchers, and several thousand years of Cheela history. The book intercuts from the Cheela, living out a few generations, and the human, living out a few minutes.

One major flaw in the book is the closeness with which the Cheela follow human historical patterns. The dynastic empire-building, the territorial disputes, the influence of technology, are all a tame version of our own history. I would have expected something a little more odd from beings living in such a strange environment.

But the point of the book, and the source of my unabashed recommendation, is the scientific speculations. For example, the humans protect themselves from the neutron star's tidal effects with six collapsed asteroids. They convert six normal asteroids into virtual gravitational point sources by the injection of magnetic monopoles. Thus they can situate their ship inside these six sources, arranged in a hexagonal pattern, and send the whole assembly to within a few hundred kilometers of the star's surface. The gravity of the asteroids cancels out the effects of the star's immense tidal pull. It is a beautiful concept, strikingly visual, and handled with a great deal of skill.

The intricacies of contact between Cheela and human are marvelously detailed. Detailed as well are the problems and advantages of living in such a mammoth gravity well. Forward has created an entire ecology on an exceedingly odd surface, in a place where the magnetic field of the star is so strong that the lines of force are almost tangible and are as much of a constant in daily life as is the gravity.

One aspect of Cheela life that Forward had fun with is sex. The Cheela are a perpetually horny bunch and leap on each other at the slightest provocation. Here is a lascivious tidbit for all you xenosexuals out there:

"She thinned herself down and slithered under the hot kneading tread of North-Wind as their eye-stubs entwined softly about one another. They took turns kneading each other's topside with their treads, concentrating on their favorite spots. Then, with their eye-stubs firmly entwined to pull their very edges together, their mutual vibrations raised in pitched with an electronic tingle adding an overtone of spice to the massage. Finally, in a multiple spasm of their bodies, a dozen tiny perimeter orifices just under North-Wind's eye-stubs opened -- to emit a small portion of his inner juices into the waiting folds around Swift-Killer's eye-stubs."

At its worst, the story is mild and inoffensive. Those who read fiction to savor the myriad ways thinking beings find to aggravate and attract each other will be bored to stupefaction by this book. Those with an interest in the outer fringes of gravity research, and an interest in some elaborate speculating on the subject, will have a great time.

--Steve Brown

ON WINGS OF SONG by Thomas Disch (Bantam Book, 1980, \$2.25) (ISBN: 0-553-13677-4)

Bantam has chosen to issue in paperback Disch's latest novel, and by doing so have rendered a great service to the sf community. In short, *On Wings of Song* was by far the best book of 1979, and there is no excuse now for missing out on reading it. I only hope that this edition is read by enough people

before this year's Hugo voting so that it wins the Hugo it so richly deserves. Tom Disch is one of only a hand full of literary geniuses in the sf field.

-Doug Fratz

NEW VOICES III: The Campbell Award Nominees. Edited by George R. R. Martin, Berkley, \$1.95, ISBN: 0-425-04484-X

The same mail that brought my review copy of *New Voices III: The Campbell Award Nominees* also brought a letter from George Flynn of the Noreascon II committee telling me that I had just been nominated for the Campbell Award myself. This made me thoughtful. Five years from now -- if God, Berkley and bookbuyers are willing, and this fine anthology series is still alive, as it deserves -- a similar volume will contain a story of mine, one I won't write for another three or four years. I read the present book with great interest.

It contains seven stories by the six writers nominated in 1975 for the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer of the Year. The editor, George R. R. Martin, has provided a thoughtful preface and introductions for each story, and Isaac Asimov offers a short (and finely written) reminiscence of John Campbell. The stories themselves comprise a microcosm of today's science fiction, in both range of subject matter and quality of writing, and a quick scan of them leads to some interesting conclusions and speculations.

John Varley's "Beatnik Bayou" displays all of the many virtues of his writing along with some of its faults. The story explores further his familiar themes of sexual identity and the nature of maturity and is enriched by a deep sensitivity to the feelings of his characters. Like most of his stories, it is a goldmine of exciting ideas casually tossed off in passing. On the negative side, Varley seems to have little notion of plot, and while "Beatnik Bayou" does have forward movement, it will finally leave the careful reader unsatisfied. In Varley's work (as in all science fiction, some would say) the ideas are everything.

In "Haute Falaise Bay" by Brenda Pearce a team of scientists and government and military officials respond in their own fashions to the arrival of an object apparently from outer space, while on a remote beach a man and a woman play out a parallel drama in more personal terms. It is a carefully crafted story, blending elements of hard-core sf with a deep human concern for the individual.

The opening sentence of Suzy McKee Charnas's "Scorched Supper on New Nigger" promises space adventure: "Bob W. Netchkay wanted my ship and I was damned if I was going to let him have it." It's space opera, all right, but with the modern difference that the narrator is a strong-minded woman. It is competent and interesting, if predictable in structure and trendy in details: certainly typical of a large segment of today's science fiction.

Alan Brennert is represented by two stories. "Stage Whisper" is a moving story of a dying playwright facing his past and his future. "Queen of the Magic Kingdom" is an equally moving portrait of a lonely woman who finds peace in that great plastic symbol of our times, Disneyland. In both stories, Brennert reveals the dignity and inner strengths of his people in a sensitive prose that marks him as the single best writer in the book. Sad to note, Brennert has left the sf field and neither of these stories is science fiction.

Felix C. Gotschalk has won a reputation as a

highly individualistic and quirky writer and "The Wishes of Maidens" will bear that out. It is a sustained tour de force of language, wit, sexual description and satire, illumined by a deep seriousness of purpose and ending with a genuine paean to the fragile beauty of human nature. It is sure to outrage many readers, while thrilling and enlightening others. It has my vote for a prize.

Finally, there is P.J. Plauger's "Virtual Image," a story that seems to be about the great fun of developing new computer programs to handle college registration procedures. Everything that can possibly be wrong with science fiction is wrong with this story: mindless premise, predictable ending, primitive characterization, adolescent motivations, awkward colorless prose, and enough wood in the dialogue to build a log cabin. It is awful. Plauger, it should be noted, was the winner of the Campbell Award in 1975.

So what do we have? We have a book of stories that capitalizes science fiction today, and probably science fiction tomorrow as well. Here is a fine writer whose sheer invention and intelligence almost make us forgive his imperfect craft, another fine writer who has abandoned science fiction completely, and another, once named Best New Writer of the Year, who, on this evidence, would be more at home tapping out computer programs. We have stories that move and enlighten us and stories that will make no difference whatever to us for having read them. We have two beautifully done stories that we cannot properly claim as "ours," and a stunning story that is uniquely made possible by the science fiction genre. We have adventure, extrapolation of modern technology, and speculation about serious themes: love, loneliness, sex, the aspirations of the human spirit. The result is an indispensable book -- indeed, an indispensable series -- that is as fascinating for its flaws as for its wonders.

And five years from now I will be represented in it myself and someone else will have to evaluate my contribution. I hope not to embarrass myself. And I shall certainly reread this review before starting work on the story.

-Alan Ryan

THE 13 CRIMES OF SCIENCE FICTION, edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin Greenberg and Charles Waugh (Doubleday, 1980, \$12.50) (ISBN: 0-385-15220-5)

I fully expected to love this anthology -- I have always enjoyed the mystery element in various good sf stories. I've always disagreed with John Campbell, and feel that the mystery and sf forms are perfect bedfellows. But this anthology is greatly disappointing in its selection of stories. The numerous stories chosen from the fifties are predominately highly antiquated, and serve as a detriment to the several excellent stories reprinted here. Numerous good stories are conspicuously absent, such as "The Barbie Doll Murders" by Varley. You just can't judge a reprint anthology by its ideas...

-Doug Fratz

THE CATALYST by Charles L. Harness, (Pocket Books, 191 pp., 1979, \$1.95)

Chalres L. Harness' *The Catalyst* is an exciting and fast-paced novel -- with some flaws. A team of scientists in the 21st century attempt to find an efficient method of synthesizing Triallene, a drug that is thought to have many potential uses. The

protagonist is Paul Blandford, a patent lawyer for the Ashtetle Company, who tries to stop the politics of the corporation from destroying the scientists' work. Harness' convincing depiction of law is drawn from his own experience as a patent lawyer. He has also set up a fascinating (if not totally believable) lab group. The group is led by Johnnie Serane, a clever and talented scientist who makes his lab team work by melding together a group of scientific misfits unable to work other lab sections. The group's adversary is a scientist and egotist for the company named Kussman, who tries to break up the lab group because of its success.

Paul's brother Billy was killed by Novarella, an epidemic created by a genetic research team. Paul discovers that Trialine may be able to cure the disease, and this is what drives him in the search for a catalyst that can synthesize Trialine. Paul becomes more and more caught up with Serane and his group — and the odd similarity between Serane and Paul's brother.

The characters in the book are interesting — especially the oddball scientists, the mysterious Serane, and the delightfully selfish Kussman (who gets rid of workers when they're too successful and programs a computer to answer questions with a holographic image of himself). The characters may not be all that realistic, but isn't that noticeable because of the exciting story.

Harness' prose is adequate for the story, but there are some very nice moments, with some fascinating, almost surrealistic imagery. The image of a bridge is used repeatedly (and used in a very good, understated cover by an unknown artist — more publishers should credit artists). Paul and his brother had a strange adventure on a bridge before

Billy died; Mary Derringer, a woman Paul becomes involved with, has a dream involving a bridge and the face of an unknown man seen behind it; and the image is repeated. The bridge may be an appropriate symbol for this book, for a bridge is a kind of catalyst, enabling something to go from one state without being changed by the process.

The background for the book is nicely worked out, although some of the biology is questionable. Harness has portrayed a highly technical society, endangered by scientific excesses like the accident which caused the epidemic, and food shortages — animal food is scarce and almost everything is carcinogenic. The author has also made good use of any personality to act as psychiatrist, talking analytic devices used in research, and so on. The book also raises some interesting questions about the ability of science to solve problems.

Charles L. Harness is highly thought of by some of his peers, but is little known to the general audience. That is mainly because of his sporadic production. He wrote for several years in the late 1940's and early 1950's, returned for a short time in the mid 1960's, and seems to have returned to writing on a more regular basis now — this is his second novel in the last few years.

As in *The Rose* and much of his earlier work, Harness hints that something strange and possibly transcendental is going on under the surface, but in *The Catalyst* this element is not as developed as it could have been. *The Catalyst* is still a good, enjoyable book with a readable and dramatic storyline.

--Alan Linkin

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

20th Century Fox
Directed by Irvin Kershner
Screenplay by Leigh Brackett and Lawrence Kasdan
Starring: Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, Billy Dee Williams, Anthony Daniels, David Prowse, Peter Mayhew, Kenny Baker, Frank Oz, Alec Guinness, etc.

Much is the same and much is different. What more can be asked of a sequel? At the Philadelphia premiere, the audience cheered at the first glimpses of the familiar characters. They had become old friends. Even Darth Vader, descendant of Doctor Doom, archvillain to end them all, whose more mundane relatives were last seen tying ladies to railroad tracks. He didn't quite get cheers, but there was a lot of stirring. The audience is involved in a movie like this, the same way it is in a good circus.

Which does not lead to profundity. It isn't supposed to. Someone a few seats behind me remarked, "The good thing about the last movie was it wasn't retentive. Just entertainment. messages." The idea of "just entertainment" tends to set up that dreary dichotomy: if it's "serious," it must be ponderous and dull; if "entertaining," it must be bubble-headed. Which leaves no room for intelligently-conceived, light fiction (or film), among other things.

If taken for what it is supposed to be, *The Empire Strikes Back* is a considerable success, moreso even than its predecessor. Whereas *Star Wars* was the most elaborate cinematic comic book yet produced, *The Empire Strikes Back* is the best pulp magazine story. It is pure PLANET STORIES. This may be presumably attributed to

the Brackett influence. Leigh Brackett wrote many of the best stories in the tradition which, thirty-five years after the fact, inspired *Star Wars*. The difference between the comic book movie and the pulp magazine movie is that the latter is on a somewhat higher level of competence. It is more imaginative, and, when taken on its own terms, less likely to insult the viewer's intelligence.

There are certain conventions. Virtually all the science is pure gibberish. Spaceships whizz through the vacuum, and sail in fleets so close together that when mismaneuvered they scrape against each other like ocean-going vessels. There are few considerations of distance or fuel-consumption. Luke Skywalker flies his tiny X-wing fighter over interstellar distances. (While it is never stated that the things can't go through hyperspace, we never see one do so, and they are not normally used for more than close-range combat, so this is dangerously close to an inconsistency, actually.) There is even an "asteroid field," the likes of which never existed outside the pulp sf, in which the rocks are so close together pilots must drive carefully to avoid them,* and inside one of the larger ones there dwells a gigantic creature which must not eat very often, since it seems to subsist on passing spacecraft. But at the same time interesting use is made of a gas giant, proving the writers know what one is, and the rest is deliberate license rather than ignorance.

*The only realistic depiction of an asteroid belt I've ever seen in a movie was in 2001. You don't remember? Two rocks drifted across the bottom of the screen at one point. Real asteroids are rarely close enough together that one is visible from another.

THE PATHCHWORK GIRL by Larry Niven (Ace Books, 1980, \$4.95) (ISBN: 0-441-65315-4)

Speaking of mystery and science fiction, Larry Niven's latest story of Gil Hamilton serves well to illustrate the utility of the form. Although this novel is by no means major Niven (I'm not even sure it is a novel in length), and in fact reads like something Niven just ground out one week, it is a highly readable piece. Unfortunately, Ace chose to package this light piece of reading as an expensive trade edition, with large type, and copious illustrations which add nothing but distraction.

-Doug Fratz

TWO TO CONQUER by Marion Zimmer Bradley. (DAW, 1980, 335 pp., \$2.25) (ISBN 0-87997-540-7)

Two To Conquer's dedication to Tanith Lee commemorates, as Marion Zimmer Bradley says, an argument that she and Tanith Lee have had and never resolved. That argument, I believe, was recently printed in an issue of THRUST which reprinted a zine article in which Marion Zimmer Bradley discussed the difference between fantasy rape and the actual crime. In Two To Conquer, the difference between rape as it is perceived by the macho protagonist Bard di Asturien and his double Paul Harryll and rape as it is experienced by many women in the book is one of the main themes of the book.

Set on Darkover in the Ages of Chaos after Stormqueen's and the breakdown of Allart Hastur's Kingdom into one hundred warring states,

Which brings us back to what is the same and what is different. The characters are still amusing caricatures for the most part, with the possible exception of Skywalker, who does develop and grow as things proceed. The Imperial Stormtroopers maintain their low standards of marksmanship. But at the same time, for all the visual gags, all the humor in the dialogue, this film is considerably more convincing dramatically than Star Wars was, because there is some indication that death and suffering are real, and the hero can actually get in danger. (By an amazing coincidence -- and it is no more than a coincidence -- in a review of Star Wars* I suggested that tension could be heightened considerably if it were shown that the bad guys could actually reach out and injure one of the primary characters. I suggested that Luke Skywalker lose an arm. And, guess what...? Well, not all of it...) There are only two or three places where the viewer says, "Oh, come on now!" One is where multi-ton armored vehicles are crippled with some really unbearably cable. Another involved Luke falling down a shaft that looks half a mile deep. There's probably an anti-gravity field working (to keep Cloud City above the gas giant), but still, he seemed to be moving rather fast, and seems to have suffered nary a bruise. There is also the admittedly time-saving coincidence whereby Luke lands on a totally uncharted, fog-enshrouded swamp planet, and the very first inhabitant he meets is the one he is looking for.

The story itself is a direct continuation of the last movie. Luke is on his way to becoming a Jedi Knight. The Princess is on her way to falling in love with Han Solo. Darth Vader is on his way to developing a perhaps strategically

*in THRUST #8

Two To Conquer is the story of Bard di Asturien, son of a Prince of Asturias, and the so called Kilghard Wolf, a wily, vicious fighter. His father, involved in scheming for the crown, wishes for two like Bard; through the use of telekinesis, he gets his wish. Paul Harry, rapist, murderer, political insurgent, and imprisoned in stasis for life, is transported to Darkover. In the ages of Chaos and the feuds which tear the Kingdoms apart, Darkover is just the world for him.

He and Bard, as I said, are doubles. They fight because it is their nature to fight and, although Bard is Darkovan and Paul Terran, they both have the same attitudes toward government and women -- scorn for weakness and conformity. Both men are predators, rapists of land or any woman they think might be available; they construct elaborate rationalizations of how their acts are justified.

Primary emphasis is on Bard and his desire to possess his wife, the Princess Caralina, who complicates his life and politics in Asturias by wishing only to be a virgin priestess of Avarra. Caralina is more than a woman to Bard; she is an obsession. Royal, legitimate, virginal her submission to him, he feels, would establish his worth in a land where he has felt scorned as a bastard. Caralina, Bard declares, is like no other woman; meanwhile other women are fair game. Nevertheless he is oddly challenged by the sorceress Melora, surely an unlikely heroine because she is overweight, matter-of-fact, and a poor rider. Since Melora will not sleep with him, he forces her sister Melisendra to and

counterproductive obsession over the aforementioned. The ghost of Obi Wan Kenobi appears a few times. There is not much of a resolution, though, as this is clearly a middle chapter in a continuing saga, and one major loose end is left dangling as Solo is last seen frozen into what looks like a gigantic chocolate bar, in the hands of a bounty hunter.

As before, the movie defines the state of the art for the science fiction film, in all respects except scripting. Three planetary environments are presented. Perhaps more impressive is the animation used for some of the alien creatures. At one point people are riding taun-tauns, half-lizard, half-kangaroo creatures, and they look real. Clearly it's some sort of stop-motion photography, but there are humans moving in the same shots, quite unlike the old gimmick in the dinosaur movies in which we cut to the actors for a reaction shot, then to the clay dinosaurs, and never the twain shall meet, except very unconvincingly. More impressive is Yoda, Luke's Jedi master, a diminutive creature with a sense of humor and very expressive ears. It's a puppet, but it really looks like a living being. As Star Wars, with its giant spaceships, planetary landscapes, etc. suggested what could be done with space opera, so The Empire Strikes Back suggests what can be done with non-human characters which cannot be impersonated by a man in a suit. Who knows? It might be possible to produce a decent hobbit. Maybe now someone will be able to do a quality job of Lord of the Rings.

Very enjoyable light entertainment. Wonderful for those too young to have grown up on PLANET STORIES. Now go read some Leigh Brackett and see where it all came from.

--Darrell Schweitzer

blames his action, of course, on both women. Ultimately, of course, he rapes Carina and blames that on her pride which wouldn't let her admit she wanted him all along.

Paul Harryl, on the other hand, falls in love with Melisendra and is immediately transformed from rapist to gentle suitor. His motivations here were not convincing, although Bradley does an outstanding job of portraying his dangerous ambivalence toward his double Bard. He doesn't know whether to hate him, to fear him, or to love him; so, in a violent, drunken sexual encounter with a serving woman, he and Bard come together too. Violence and machismo, in this act, seem to culminate in narcissism: what both men seem to want at this stage is to be complete in themselves, not to be vulnerable as love makes one.

But Harrell is transformed by Melisendra. Bard, however, learns not to rape by attacking Carina who turns on him the vengeance of the Goddess she serves. This vengeance takes the form of reliving, from the woman's point of view, what he has done and how revolted Carina is by it. The knowledge all but shatters him and sends him -- in the midst of a battle -- fleeing to a tower where the sorceress Melora's respect for him heals him. Here too he allies with Varril, who is known elsewhere in the Dark-over series as the man who ended the use of long-range weapons like clifffire, which resembles napalm, and bonewater dust, which is something like fallout.

Returning with his new allies, he finds his father and brother dead in an attack and his double on the throne of Asturias. Secure in a new self-knowledge and respect, he must somehow resolve this tangle with his double without resorting to the wolflike savagery which has always made him his own worst enemy.

To Marion Zimmer Bradley's credit, she has pulled off a long, complex novel in which the characterization is as intricate -- and as convincing -- as the plot and the world-creation. Two To Conquer enriches the Dark-over mythos by explaining various Darkovan

institutions such as the Free Amazons, by reinforcing the parallel with what becomes the Terran Empire, by stressing that the Compact which causes Terra trouble on Darkover in later centuries is a protective, not an oppressive institution. "Medieval" Dark-over, if we can call it that, is a violent and richly compelling place.

But Bradley's greatest success is with the character of Bard of Asturias. There is no getting round it: Bard is a killer, a rapist, power-hungry, and likely to turn on brother as quickly as on an enemy. In fact, he does. But Bard is also a profoundly introspective man at times, fiercely loyal to father and half-brother, proud of their heritage, and even capable of emotional sensitivity. He is, as Melora says, two people in conflict with one another: the man who loves her, and the man who denies the possibility of love.

Because of the ultimately sympathetic resolution of the problem of Bard's character, Two To Conquer may well be Marion Zimmer Bradley's most controversial novel. I found myself loathing her protagonist in one chapter, yet, in the next, pitying him despite my own personal tendency to regard all rapists as guilty until proven innocent. I do not like being made to feel sorry for a rapist, or to accept the logic of a story that ends with Bard as husband and king -- yet accept it I must. It makes sense within the book. And outside the book, it stands as a startlingly humane statement: even predators are people with a capacity to change, to become people. They can't be written off.

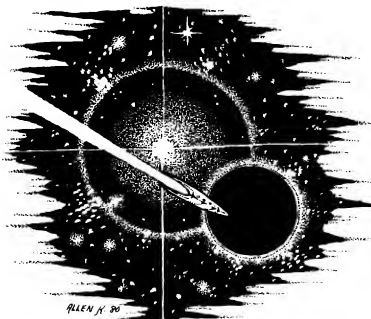
Because of Marion Zimmer Bradley's refusal to write off Bard as a stock villain, she has created a psychological complex book that is also a tribute to her own capacity for acceptance and tolerance.

—Susan Shwartz

WHO? by Algis Budrys (Gregg Press, 1979 intro. by R. Glenn Wright, xi plus 157 pp. \$10.95)

This is the first American hardcover of Algis Budrys' second novel, originally published in 1958. It is an impressive piece of work, and a worthy addition to any science fiction library. (In case anyone doesn't know yet, Gregg Press editions are designed for libraries, with paper and binding capable of lasting centuries, yet priced not much more expensively than many modern "hardcovers" which will fall apart as quickly as a paperback.)

Probably the most impressive thing about it is the number of ways it didn't go wrong. It is a serious novel about the nature of identity and the condition of mankind in the 20th Century technological world. It also has a lot to do with the cold war. Thus it could have gotten preachy or pompous, but it didn't. The character of the title, a scientist injured in an explosion and prosthetically reconstructed by the Russians until the American can't be sure he's the same person, has an insoluble problem. He could have spent the whole book feeling sorry for himself and the book would have degenerated into Existential Woe-Is-Me. But it didn't. And it is a serious book plotted like a first-rate espionage thriller, and this aspect is skillfully integrated. In less capable hands it might have pulled the novel apart. The result is an exciting, intelligent, sometimes very moving drama.



An excellent antidote for Perry Rhodans, Gor books, *Bartletrap Galactica* novelizations, and similar mindless effluvia.

--Darrell Schweitzer

SAN DIEGO LIGHTFOOT SUE AND OTHER STORIES by Tom Reamy (Earthlight Publishers, 5539 Jackson, Kansas City, MO 64130, 1980, \$14.95) (ISBN: 0-935128-00-X)

Tom Reamy's death at so young an age (42), and only a few years into his writing career, represents a loss to the fantasy and sf field greater than any since the early death of Cyril Kornbluth. This book, published by some of his closest friends, represents virtually the total short fiction output of Tom Reamy (the exceptions being two stories still to see print in other sources). Excellent introduction and afterword by Harlan Ellison and Howard Waldrop are also included, and a cover by Leo & Dianne Dillon. Reamy established himself, in his terribly short career, as one of the field's greatest fantasists. If you buy only one limited edition hardcover this year, I suggest you make it this one.

--Doug Frazz

CHANGELING by Roger Zelazny (Ace, 1980, 272 pp., \$6.95). (ISBN: 0-441-10265-5).

After conquering an evil sorcerer and his hoards of monsters, a mob of villagers and their good magician find themselves in a bind: The sorcerer's infant son is left alive, an innocent baby -- but one with a natural talent for magic. They don't want to kill the child, but he's too dangerous to let grow up. The good magician

solves the dilemma by exchanging the baby for one from a highly technological parallel world. Unfortunately, the second child has a natural bent for machinery, managing to outrage people in the magic-run world where he grows up. When he discovers and reanimates remnants of forbidden technology, he plans revenge against the villagers; the good magician is forced to summon the sorcerer's son, who up till now has thought of himself as a musician with some minor psi powers. The two young men meet warily, quarrel over a girl, and square off -- machines against sorcery.

A reviewer runs into some difficulty after giving such a partial plot summary of the novel. Sword & sorcery fans will be attracted, seeing it as a clever variation of standard plot elements. Others will be immediately repelled. In particular, Zelazny has taken quite a few knocks recently for not writing with the manifest seriousness of his early novels. And now another sss novel? Well, not really. Not just another piece of genre dreck. For one thing, *Changeling* is lively and vivid, in Zelazny's polished, seemingly effortless style. True, the characters tend to sound alike, human or non-human; they're all intelligent, articulate, likeable. But that actually complicates the easy, simple-minded attitude common to sss, since it's almost as easy to identify with the "villain" as the "hero." Besides, those villagers are a singularly unlikeable lot, who deserve some stomping on... One wonders: Can the two ways of thinking co-exist? Must one wipe out the other? *Changeling* is not just the lightweight packet of fun and games it seems. The story leads naturally to

cont. on pg. 35

San Diego Lightfoot Sue

and other stories

Tom Reamy

Tom Reamy was a writer with an extraordinary understanding of the dark things that walk in the daytime as well as the light that shines despite deepening shadows. Whether he was writing about a young man's coming of age or life at the end of the world, he brought not only a sense of realism to his stories but a transcendent beauty and sensitivity.

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Orson Scott Card
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#14 I gather that some comments were made implying that Ben Bova, one of the most decent men I've known, has been engaged in some sort of conflict of interest because his wife, Barbara Bova, is my agent. I am surprised that such responsible writers would have missed information that a tiny amount of research would have unearthed:

Barbara Bova does not handle my magazine-length science fiction and draws no commission from my magazine sales, with the one exception of *Songhouse*, sold to Stan Schmidt to *ANALOG*, which she handled because it was part of a novel she was handling. Otherwise, I deal directly with magazine and anthology editors, except when a reprint editor solicits second rights to a published story of mine, in which case Barbara steps in as a courtesy to me. Contrary to Spider Robinson's friendly speculation, I did not sell any stories to

Apparently, I missed a pollock-
ing good hatchet job on my early
work when I failed to read

Thrust #13. From the letters in

Diana King before Ben came to *Omni*—she had one story that she wanted to publish, but when Ben arrived at the magazine he rejected it immediately because it was not the sort of story he wanted to use in *Omni* (pure romantic fantasy).

The publishers of *Omni* are thoroughly aware of Barbara's and my author-agent relationship, and they apparently have detected no conflict of interest. Presumably they believe that Ben buys my work because he likes it.

Darrell Schweitzer
113 Deepdale Road
Strafford, PA 15087

I find Gardner Dozois' summary of the year 1979 interesting, but there is one glaring omission, named Barry Longyear, who is nowhere to be found in Dozois' account, not even in the second or third stratum of new writers (which includes at least one who has yet to publish anything). He also fails to mention "Enemy Mine" among the notable fiction. And it, on a Nebula, and will probably win a Hugo and Longyear will probably win a Campbell Award. To make life interesting, I believe he made more money in the first 18 months of his career (see article in *WTFIT!*) than any previous genre writer who ever lived. How about that? I would suggest he is the most noteworthy entrant into the field in the past couple of years. The omission is like failing to mention Larry Niven as a noteworthy writer in the mid to late sixties. Curiouser and curiouser.

I disagree with Gardner on some other points. I don't find *FSF* consistently reliable anymore. I'm seeing a lot of very minor work by big names. The fantasy is very good, and the serials are very good, but I suspect the magazine is slipping under the competition from markets which pay, on the average, nearly twice as much for science fiction short stories.

Another non-nevadan magazine which I think needs mentioned is *WEIRDWOOD*, which is fully as good as *WISCONSIN* in story content, if less sophisticated graphically. It is also the granddaddy of the whole small press field, being the only such magazine more than 10 years old. (Recent stories were by Michael Bishop, Dennis Stinson, C.L. Grant, H. Warner Mun, and others.)

The charge that ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE is a formula magazine continues to a use and abuse me. It's curious to know what the formula is. Maybe we could pass it on to the writers. I'm sure that they are as much in the dark as I am.

By the way, something went wrong with my letter of comment in issue #15. I am fairly sure that I was not present at the awful panel described by Bischoff, and yet here I find myself saying I was. If I can't believe myself...

Arnie Fenner
1100 Countyline Road
Building G, J29
Kansas City, MO 64103

Cudos, applause and compliments to Michael Bishop for his "A Speculation of SF Writers" in the most recent *THRUST*.

In particular, I was most happy to see Steve Uley and Gardner Dozois get a much needed part into the spotlight, a spotlight that's been hogged of late by writers who don't possess a visible will of either author's talent or skill. It's a shame that when the general public thinks of science fiction, they have images of STAR WARS, STAR TREK, etc. coming through their heads instead of the staggering visions portrayed in *Strangers*, or Uley's of "The Small World 'Tung Like An Elephant" (in collaboration with Joe Pulliam). Or, if we're talking *chinchilla*, the entire body of work produced by Howard Waldrop. Or Lisa Tuttle.

Or even Michael Bishop, who is underappreciated

if you ask me and far more deserving of a Hugo than, say, Caruso Bug.

And wouldn't you know that it's Doris who has provided the most insight into the fields of fantasy and science fiction over the past few years with his Best of the Year introductions. He knows what makes things tick and his observations hit straight and true when other reviewers/editors are caught hanging by their "sense of wonder".

Bill Glass Charles Sheffield's piece on book reviews was painfully to the point. I got very self-conscious over the synoptic form of my

Ramsh review in the same issue. (I rationalize, saying it's been a year or more since the book came out, and it was doubtlessly missed by a lot of people who may now look it up. Also there is a lot of good in the book left unmentioned for those who can find copies.) My comments on Del Rey's packaging policy still stand.)

All the reviews of the new Heinlein say he's deep-sixing himself to the third exponent. Only Spider Robinson says it's a success, proclaiming all who say it's bad to be small-minded liars. Robinson's reputation may be as well served by that review as Robert Heinlein's is by the book.

It also appears that Spider Robinson has further persisted in his efforts to defend Heinlein's recent works: in the newest issue of *Densities*, he accuses that all those critical of *The Number of the Beast* are blinded by their opposition to Heinleinian philosophy. As one of those critics, I certainly plan to address these accusations at length in the next issue of this magazine, or elsewhere. -DDE/

We also heard from: Richard S. McEnroe, James J.J. Wilson, Carl Bennett, Peter Silverman, Karen Kuykendall, Paul C. Allen, Robert Frazier, Patricia Matthews, Charles T. Smith. - DDE/

VINGE

cont. from pg. 9

THRUST: THE WHITE GODDESS taught me about the historicity of the matriarchal construct; it reminded me of alternatives. Is it science fiction's place to educate or make your think, like Grave's book does?

VINGE: The reaction you had to THE WHITE GODDESS is the sort I often have to reading anthropology or sf -- it makes you realize that the way things function in your small portion of the world, the galaxy, the universe, are not necessarily universal truths. It throws you off guard. In order to simply write the stuff, you have to stretch your imagination; try to see past what is into what could be. John Gardner, in his book about "moral" fiction, cites that sf is one of the few kinds of fiction being written now that actively attempts to give the reader something to think about, something more than mind candy. I think serious literature has always attempted to do more than entertain. Jim Frenkel of Dell Books once told me that he feels science fiction is modern literature, the literature of our current, future-shock, changing society; as opposed to "mainstream" literature, which is usually set in a static world that more resembles the 1950's.

THRUST: Is there any one setting in your stories

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to date that you plan to expand into a future history?

VINGE: Right now I am enjoying the exploration of different possible futures, as many as I can. A few stories have fallen into the same setting -- the Heaven Belt stories, and a couple which could lie in the same future, the earlier -- but it is not due to specific intentions. On the other end, once I have created any distinct future, I definitely consider it open to further exploration, like a new found land.

THRUST: Do you feel that you have found your wings as a novelist?

VINGE: Yes, I think so. When I started out to write THE SNOW QUEEN I had no idea it would be 600+ pages long (in manuscript); but even a "normal" length novel seemed daunting. I was lucky I didn't know the truth, or I might never have started it. Now, after having written something this long, I feel less daunted by the novel length. In some ways it's easier than writing shorter works; you don't have to change gears mentally so often, so the gross amount of wordage is much higher. My next big project novel will be a separate entity though, a complete story within itself. If the series comes out as I hope, all the separate books will complement and enhance the total effect of the saga. It's currently called *The Origen Loop*, and will have as part of its background the 4 worlds of Hopi mythology. I guess I've always by nature been someone who has to write long. I foresee more short things in the future, because I still get "short" ideas. But novels will probably be my main creative medium from now on.

THIS MAN IS DANGEROUS!

I think Heavy Metal sucks. I think it's idiotic beyond belief.

...I tagged him a good one, right in the pudding trough, and zappo!, over he went, ass-over-teakettle...

"Weirdworld" is bad, cheap, silly imitation Tolkien. And Tolkien is imbecile shit to begin with!



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